

STORY OF MADGE AND THE FAIRY CONTENT.



BY

Blanchard



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AND
THE FAIRY CONTENT.

BY
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THE STORY OF MADGE

AND

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CHAPTER I.

MADGE'S DISCONTENT.

IT was a wonderful kitchen wherein, on a certain Christmas eve, Madge played an active part. The raisins lay in rich brown heaps ; the sight of the lustrous candied fruits kept the eyes of Master Orlando (what fine names we all have now-a-days !) wide open, long after their usual hour for closing ; the sly fingers of Miss Cecilia had made one or two bold incursions upon the portly basin of currants, and Master Ulysses had

been thrice driven, at the point of the rolling-pin, from the pounded sugar. Every five minutes a ring at the wonderful kitchen-bell announced the arrival of more Christmas fare. A huge sirloin was received with cheers by the young hopes of the Barthlemy family. The turkey had a frantic reception. Master Ulysses informed the cook that mamma had promised him he should eat as many mince pies as ever he could, on the morrow; and that Master Orlando, aged three years, was to sit up for supper.

A magnificent fire crackled through a formidable row of bars; and all kinds of sauce-pans were bubbling and simmering about it. Of course the boiler was heated, and was emitting that curious earthy odour peculiar to warm boilers. Twenty times had Madge been told by the cook to be sure she looked after the boiler fire: twenty times had Madge been im-

plored to take those tiresome children to bed; and as often had cook been met by the assertion that missus had given orders to let the children see the pudding made.

“Drat the pudding; and that’s all about it!” exclaimed Madge. Madge had been in a very bad temper all day. She had confided her grief to the cook, who had laughed at her. This treatment had aggravated the gloomy symptoms of the morning. “Yes; drat the pudding, and that’s all about it!” repeated the angry housemaid, slamming the pantry-door upon the turkey to give emphasis to her speech.

“Hadn’t you better include turkey and sirloin; and there’s the chestnuts?” said the cook, her face gleaming with the grease of “thirty thousand dinners!” “Say, ‘Drat everything,’ Madge; it may relieve you.”

“Well, then, drat everything;—there, I’ve

said it," responded Madge, as she turned to stone more plums.

"Don't be angry with the plums," said cook, watching Madge's vehement use of the knife upon them.

"We stone the plums, and our share's the stones," said Madge, giving a scowl at Miss Cecilia at the same time.

"Don't talk so before the children."

Master Ulysses had been an attentive listener to this altercation between the servants; and he conceived that his time had arrived for suggesting an inquiry as to who, in that warm, bright, pungent kitchen, was "a cross-patch"?

Miss Cecilia appeared to relish her brother's suggestion; and the two laughed their loudest, the young gentleman dancing about the table, and pointing his finger to Madge the while. Madge bit her lip, and observed that she knew

somebody who wanted his ears boxed. Still the plums were being vehemently stoned. The cook was becoming momentarily more excited over her aromatic table, where all the ingredients of the great Barthlemy Christmas pudding were lying. Master Orlando had never raised his chin from the table, nor permitted his eyes to wander for an instant from cook's fingers. He believed that the cook, whose hands were freely wandering from sweet to sweet; who could toss piles of plums and currants about carelessly, as though they were not the most delicious things in the whole world, and as though the free licence to eat as many of them as she could, were not a privilege beyond any other the world could bestow; he believed that this autocrat of the sugar-basin, and comptroller of the spice-box, was to be envied beyond any other human being. He

could not, for the life of him, understand why this great commander of the plum pudding never put plum or sugar in mouth or pocket. We believe that the infant mind of Master Orlando held his mamma's cook in contempt. Given by blind Fortune the most magnificent position in the world, the ungrateful creature was not thankful. But if Master Orlando believed cook to be an idiot, because she did not devour every second plum, he was convinced, in his own baby mind, that his elder brother was a hero. In truth, Master Ulysses was worthy of his martial name. He harassed the enemy incessantly. Now his head bobbed up under the cook's arm; and now, unperceived, his nimble fingers were in the basin before cross Madge. He had secured at least half-a-dozen chestnuts, and his pockets were distended with sugar. To him the kitchen-table was the

enemy's territory ; and it was his duty to pillage to the utmost.

"Uly ! Uly !" cried Miss Cecilia, from time to time, when a larger prize than usual fell within her brother's grasp.

"Now then, sneak !" was the young gentleman's courteous retort.

"He may eat them all for me !" said Madge, still pouting and frowning, dashing the plums upon the table as though they were so many wasps. In due time the plums and candied fruit, the eggs and sugar and flour, and all the sweet ingredients of that pudding which is the pride and glory of little children (and of many grown children also) all over England, in due time, we repeat, the ingredients were brought into a harmonious mixture, within the circle of a portly earthenware vessel.

The cook—and as the directress of the Barth-

lemy kitchen may appear again before the reader, let it be known that her name was Possum—Possum, then, stood over her masterpiece, in all the pride of one who felt that she had not lived in vain. It befel Madge, in a careless moment, to ask Possum how she made that pudding. Now Possum was naturally a good-tempered woman: but there are questions that vanquish the equanimity of the most angelic natures, and luckless Madge had put one of these questions to Possum.

“Madge,” said Possum, “that secret was my mother’s before it was mine; and it shall go to my grave with me. How did I make it, indeed?”

Possum looked affectionately into the bowl that held her triumph, as a mother looks into a cradle.

And Madge sulked again; and declared that

Possum might convey her receipt to its ultimate destination at her very earliest convenience. Graceless, gloomy Madge!

The children had rushed from the kitchen to the drawing-room. Papa and mamma, and aunt Tottie, and old Mr. Labrador (who was playing chess with papa) must stir the pudding. No excuse would be accepted from any of them. Papa silyly suggested that Cecilia could stir it for him; and old Mr. Labrador, as he put Mr. Barthlemy's castle in check, patted baby on the cheek, and coaxed him to hold the spoon in the kitchen for the gentleman who bought him the rocking-horse. But the children would not listen to any compromise. Uly turned on his heel, and muttered something about sneaks, and about his never having seen such chaps—the chaps in question being his parent and the venerable Mr. Labrador.

"Hush!" said mamma to Uly, raising a pretty finger at him.

Mamma put her hand softly upon her husband's shoulder, and said, in that rich and gentle voice a mother's has whose home is rich in love—"Come, dear, to please the children."

"They're coming—they're coming!" shouted Uly down the stairs. He sprang breathlessly into the kitchen; and took up an advantageous position opposite Possum; who was now, in anticipation of master's awful presence in the kitchen, frantically adjusting her cap. Madge slunk away to a dark corner; and repeated to herself again and again—"It's all very well for them upstairs!"

Papa entered the kitchen, holding the arm of mamma, and bearing Master Orlando upon his shoulders. Cecilia was at Mr. Labrador's side. Mr. Labrador was lame and dim-sighted; and

the little girl naturally lingered near him to tell him how many steps there were, and to pick his stick up should he drop it.

"Well, Possum," said Mrs. Barthlemy, "is everything right? But I know you never forget anything."

Possum smiled her most gracious smile, and still, as the party gathered round the fragrant pudding, stirred it.

"Come—now then ; who stirs first?" said Uly.

"Why, baby, to be sure, sir," answered mamma.

And baby scrambled from the paternal shoulder, to receive a solemn lesson on the way he should hold the spoon. But, the spoon once in his hands, he was in no hurry to relinquish it. He stirred vigorously ; and then prepared to test at once the excellence of Possum's manufacture. Whereupon the spoon was forcibly wrenched

from Orlando's plump little fingers ; and he fell sobbing with bitter disappointment, into his mother's arms. Then Cecilia timidly stirred : then Uly dashed the spoon into the bowl, and made a whirlpool in it ; then mamma and then papa took their turn, and then Mr. Labrador was dragged forward.

" May all God's creatures have a day's comfort to-morrow," said the serious old gentleman, as he stirred Possum's pudding.

" Now for Possum !" shouted Uly.

" Be quiet, Master Uly," said bashful Possum.

" Come, come, cook," cried Mr. Barthlemy, " who has a better right to stir the pudding than she who made it."

And Possum, blushing red as a peony, bashfully stirred the pudding she had made.

Then Uly raised a shout for Madge. But Madge came not.

The procession now moved back towards the drawing-room. Madge was the only human creature in Paramount Villa (such was the unostentatious name of Mr. Barthlemy's suburban residence) who had not stirred the plum-pudding.

"Well," said Possum, "the blame be on her own cross head, if anything happens to her."

It was the solemn belief of Possum that the man or woman who would not stir the pudding on Christmas Eve, would inevitably meet with some disaster before Christmas came round again. You could no more have driven this superstition out of Possum's head, than you could have persuaded her to alter her receipt for plum pudding by one plum. She took her stand upon examples, which she could quote by the dozen; but all she knew on the occasion which has afforded us an opportunity of presenting her to the public,

was that she should not like to stand in Madge's shoes.

"Well, is all that stuff and nonsense over?" inquired Madge, as she bounced into the kitchen, after the stirring party had returned to the drawing-room. "Is it quite over?"

Possum tossed her head; and vowed that she had no patience with the temper of some people, taking care to leave very little doubt in the mind of Madge as to the identity of "some people."

"Let them keep in their drawing-room, and leave us our kitchen," Madge continued. "Here we work, work, work from morning to night, while my lady (a contemptuous reference to Mrs. Barthlemy) spreads herself in an easy-chair, and fans herself. The luck of some people! Well, it does make me cross—and I own it—there!" Madge sat before the fire, and rocked and nursed her anger.

Master Uly burst into the kitchen, carrying a steaming jug of punch.

"Here, I've brought some punch for you," said Uly; "and isn't it nice, that's all?"

Madge stared doggedly at the fire.

"Has she stirred the pudding?" asked Uly, addressing Possum, and pointing by jerks of his hand to Madge.

"No, she hasn't," Madge answered—still staring into the fire.

"Then she shall," said Uly, "and no mistake about it." Uly tried to drag Madge to the table, but she was immoveable. Then he tested the strength of his satirical talent. Wouldn't it stir the pudding? Was it cross; and didn't it know why? Did it want a bit of sugar? Didn't they buy it any toys? But these shafts of wit fell unheeded upon the head of Madge.

"Get along with your impudence!" was Madge's only reply.

Uly was not to be turned from his purpose.

Possum declared that she was on the point of tying the pudding up. In a quarter of an hour it must be in the boiler, at the very latest.

Uly now directed his attention to Possum. He vowed that she should carry the pudding to Madge; while he would make her hold the spoon.

Madge was fairly caught at last. She dashed the spoon into the pudding-bowl, and as she stirred, cried: "Drat the pudding!"

In a very awful frame of mind, according to Possum, was the human creature, who on Christmas-eve could exclaim:—"Drat the pudding!"

CHAPTER II.

MADGE'S CHRISTMAS DAY.

IT was Christmas morning. It was a bright, cold morning; and the gable ends of Paramount Villa were tufted with snow. It was, in short, the weather proper to Christmas. The Barthlemy household was stirring betimes, for there was much to be accomplished before the dinner hour. Master Uly was implored to remain in the nursery with his brother and sister during the morning; and not to plague his mamma, or show his face in the kitchen. All kinds of pains and penalties were to punish the infraction of the laws that were laid down for his guidance. The forfeiture of pudding, his

present hanging upon the Christmas tree, his dessert, and, finally, early bed, were the penalties that hung over the devoted head of Uly. They kept him in the nursery for at least an hour and a half. During this time he painted baby's face, pinched his sister's fingers in the door-hinge, put out one of the eyes of her best doll, and wrote his name in bold round hand with a burnt stick upon the fresh wall-paper. He was now at his wit's end. There was no more mischief to be done in the nursery; and his curiosity to know how matters were progressing below became almost ungovernable. He declared that had it not been for that cross Madge he should be enjoying the spectacle of Possum stuffing the turkey. Possum had, moreover, promised him some hot custard. He opened the nursery door and peeped out. Madge was upon the landing.

"Ah! sir, I see you. I'll tell your papa," cried Madge.

"Will it go and tell? Is it cross about nothing?" responded Uly, and then he slammed the nursery door, and made another search for further mischief to be done, but beyond the addition of a little more vermilion to baby's nose, his search was unsatisfactory. Madge was heard to descend to the kitchen, whereupon Uly ventured upon a second *sortie*. He cast an observant nose over the banisters, and vowed that he could smell the turkey. Seeing the coast clear, he crept downstairs to the point whence he might command a view of the dining-room. Here a sneeze made his presence known to his mamma, who was busy before a table loaded with fruit, piling oranges and grapes in a centre dish.

"You naughty boy!" cried mamma, endea-

vouring with all her might to look angry. "You naughty boy, what did your papa tell you?"

Uly scampered back to the nursery. Ten times at least was the audacious heir to the honours of the house of Barthlemy driven back to the nursery by his mamma, or by Madge. It was fortunate for the trespasser that his father was in his little studio, under lock and key, setting out the glories of the Christmas-tree. It was on the very subject of this tree that Uly and his sister were perplexed. Uly hoped that his present was not a writing-desk. Cecilia had dreamt of a white cornelian heart set in gold and hung upon a velvet about her neck. She was not quite sure she believed in dreams, but suppose this dream should come true, wouldn't it be fine? As for baby Orlando, he played with his horse and cart, in profound indifference

for all besides. He would take his fair share of the pudding when he saw it before him, and he would be found effective at the roast-chestnut crisis, but he could not be brought to look into the future. It was his business, as it is the business of all babies, to keep to the present and to enjoy it. Let him drag a lump of sugar about in his cart, and he will be content till it shall please nurse to seize upon him and forcibly wash him for dinner.

In the kitchen Possum had declared to Madge, before the breakfast was cleared off, that she (Possum) would not have her (Madge's) temper for all she could think of. Madge was, in truth, even sulkier than she had been on the previous evening. Every laugh that rang from the nursery or dining-room or from the mysterious chamber where the Christmas-tree was being loaded—every laugh added to her ill-temper.

Other people were laughing while she was working.

"Think of the poor people as have got no roof over them at all to-day, you wicked creature!" cried Possum, as she hung the plumpest of Norfolk turkeys before a clear fire, and with solemn composure arranged a bright pan to catch the precious juices of this prince of the Christmas table. "Think of that, and bless God that you have a comfortable place and a kind missus."

"Comfortable place, indeed!" Madge retorted, tossing her head, "but some people can make themselves comfortable anywhere."

"Exactly," replied Possum; "and there's some that can't make themselves comfortable nowhere."

"Well, there's one good thing, I haven't got to wait at table. They've had the decency to







hire Mr. Brocoli for the occasion—the suspicious occasion I believe they call it.”

“What presents are there for the servants, my dear?” asked Mr. Barthlemy, addressing his wife. The lady went to her room, and produced two dresses, two collars, and two neck-ribbons. They were added to the tree, together with two very small paper parcels that Mr. Barthlemy packed himself. Even Mouse the terrier was not forgotten upon that tree loaded with trinkets and toys that each bore a spirit of love or goodwill upon it. Mouse would, that evening, sleep in a new collar.

Although it was the belief of Uly that dinner time would never come, it did come. Madge did open the nursery-door at last, and snatch up baby to wash and pomatum him for the drawing-room. Miss Cecilia was adjusted in her new dress, and stood in all the glory of a fresh blue

sash. Uly himself was at length in his new suit, and had prepared himself to obey the strict injunctions of his father, viz., to come to table with clean hands. In the drawing-room the children found a hearty welcome. Mr. Labrador was there in that prodigiously high stock of his, and with the thin tufts of his white hair brushed in a horizontal line from the back of his head to the corners of his eyes. His yellow and red Corah (his favourite lobster-salad pattern) hung from his coat-pocket—his flag announcing a high festival. Papa was reading the Christmas number of the *Illustrated London News*. Mamma was sitting, with open arms, expecting baby. Cecilia crept to her mother's side, and whispered about the pudding. Had it turned out well? Brocoli, the man-servant engaged for what cross Madge called "the suspicious occasion," announced dinner.

There had been a discussion between Uly and his sister as to who had the better chance of being placed opposite the turkey. When Uly found himself fairly on this vantage ground, he exchanged looks and signs of triumph and derision with the young lady who had been worsted. It would not amuse the reader, who is, we trust, well acquainted with the details of luxurious Christmas fare, to be told how the Barthlemys ate their dinner. It stands to reason that Uly insisted upon being served twice to turkey, and that he was only diverted from an attack upon a side dish at hand by the kind maternal suggestion that he must remember there were pudding and dessert to come. Of course baby was almost buried behind a table-napkin, out of which his stout arms were stretched to be in constant waiting upon his mouth, and to aid the ingress of any unruly

morsel into it. The pudding with blue forked lightning playing about it, naturally created a great sensation. In the excitement baby stood in his chair, and in spite of the indisputable *mauvais ton* he showed in leaning across Mr. Labrador, made a plunge at the flaming mass, spoon in hand. The spoon just escaped the faultless frill of Mr. Labrador's shirt. Still, the old gentleman smiled, and only called the vehement young diver, a rogue. Mrs. Barthlemy was sure the naughty child was troublesome, but Mr. Labrador protested that it was one of the most delightful and soothing things in the world to have a child's dirty spoon thrust into one's shirt frill. At dessert baby was more subdued. His whole energy was given to the process of digestion. Still his little button of a nose appeared over the edge of an orange into which he was slowly burrowing, and by its con-

stant movement assured his doting mamma that he was not asleep. Uly had soon felt himself vanquished, and repeatedly declared aloud that he wished he hadn't had twice of turkey. Still, he was repairing his fault by filling his pockets. The Barthlemy Christmas dinner passed off, in short, with great spirit. The children ate much more than was good for them, and were consequently content.

But there was one creature under Mr. Barthlemy's roof who was profoundly miserable. Even the persuasive power of Mr. Brocoli (who had a fair business, and had lost his wife) could not comfort her. And so, the dinner served, Madge went straight to her room at the top of the house, to sit alone, beyond the reach of the laughter in the drawing-room.

"I can't tell what's come to that girl," said Possum to Mr. Brocoli.

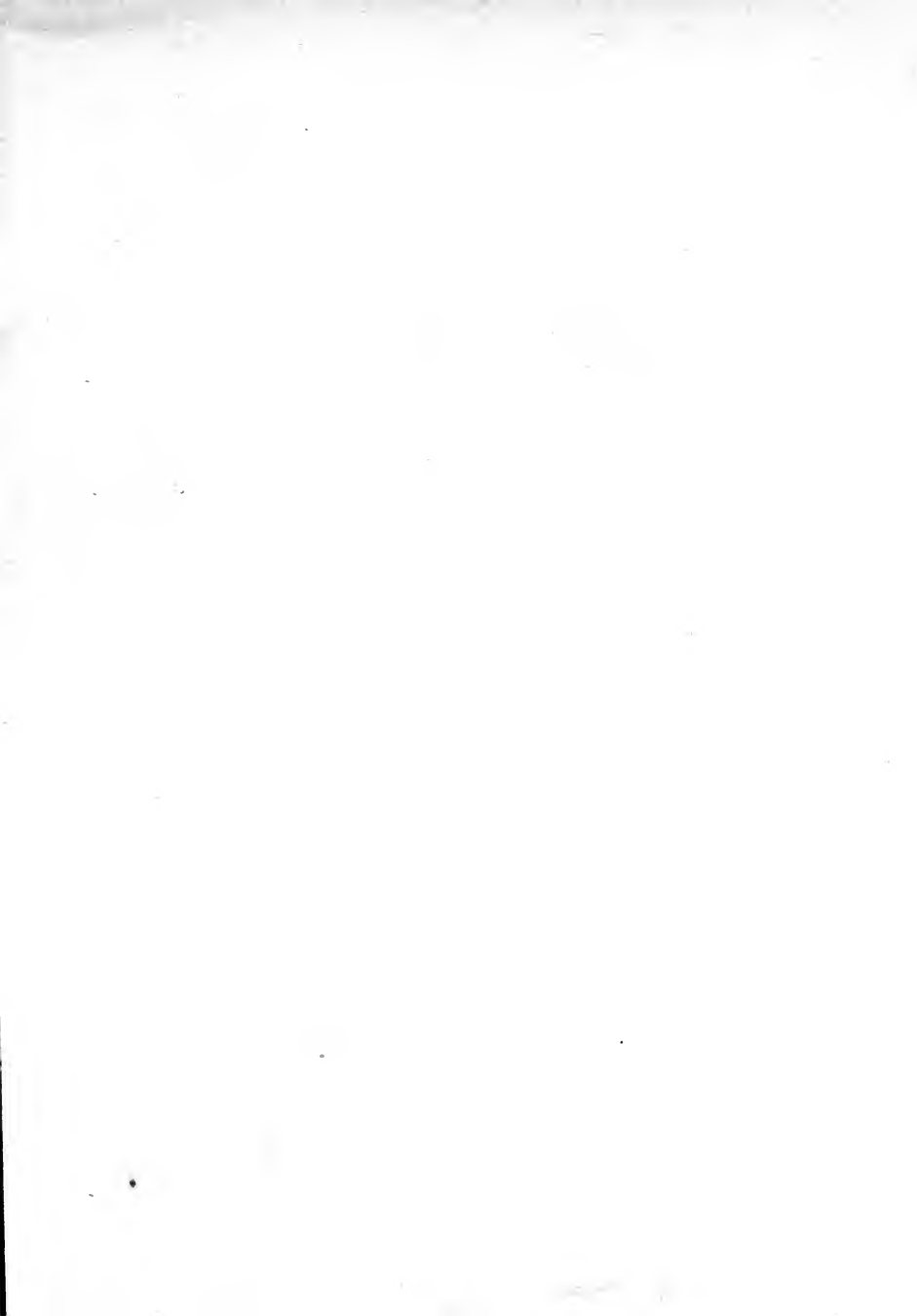
"Nor I neither," was this gentleman's profound and memorable answer.

Once fairly in her room, Madge, having locked the door, burst into tears. "Why was she born? What good was there for her in this world? She could understand the good-temper of people who rode in carriages and sat in drawing-rooms, and had servants to wait upon them. But to be the servant! To have to work from morning till night, to answer knocks and rings, to wear eternal gingham, and have to be thankful for missus' cast-off clothes! Where was the enjoyment of this? There they were, those Barthlemys, down stairs, with all the luxuries of life before them. The servants must have their leavings. It was cruel to bring people into the world to be servants—very, very cruel."

Madge, in a violent fit of grief, flung herself upon her bed, and wept.

How long she wept, and how soon she exhausted her grief, it matters not to inquire ; but it is enough to declare that after a copious shower of tears she lay calm and silent. Her eyes were red, and her bosom now and then heaved gently with the remains of her sobs.

The moon shone gently aslant the little room ; but there was a light there that was not from the moon. In the silent, solemn night, a gentle courageous Spirit floated to the poor waiting-maid's room. There was a genial glow in the light about her. On that icy Christmas night she brought abundant warmth with her—a warmth that broke a smile upon every cheek that felt it, and laughter upon all lips upon which it fell. Up to the waiting-maid's garret—far above the revelry that made the air musical about London streets—floated this gladsome





Spirit on a mission befitting the day whereon it was accomplished.



And the Spirit, mistily robed, stood at the side of sleeping Madge's bed. Madge was blue with the cold. The Spirit touched the sleeper with her finger, and warmth flushed the sleeper's cheek,

and made her lips cherry-red. And then a smile stole over the girl's features, as sunbeams steal again over a valley from which a cloud had parted them. The movements of the Spirit were musical as leaves stirred by the south wind.

Presently the face of the good Spirit was clearly visible. It was a radiant, happy-tempered face—a face to make happy every beholder. In that cold garret, on that winter night, it looked warm and pleasant. It made sunshine, indeed, in that very shady place, as its beams played upon the sleeping figure of poor, discontented Madge.

Gradually Madge's eyes opened, and still she smiled. Resting on her elbow, she contemplated the dim outline, crowned by the lovely face before her.

"You are sad, child," said the Spirit, in a

voice that was a thrilling harmony. "You are sad. What ails you?"

Madge dropped her eyes in confusion, but spake not.

"I read your thoughts. I have heard of your sorrow; but it is not well that you should call me here, when I have most solemn calls elsewhere. I have come to your aid, then listen to me. Under this roof, where there are comforts manifold, where there are happy creatures passing, as they should pass, a happy day, you have frowned the light through, and have removed yourself from your fellow-creatures to bewail your destiny, and nurse bad feelings towards those who are at this moment bearing your happiness in mind. It irks you that your lot is cast in humble life; that you eat the price of the work of your hands; that you have not the wealth of the creatures for whom you labour.

Most ignoble fretfulness is this—as you shall see.”

“Drat that pudding!” smote upon Madge’s ear from some strange voice—not the Spirit’s.

The Spirit continued, a little solemnly now, in her sweet and gentle voice—

“Oh, the work that is done, and done in this world cheerfully! The heavy sum of work and pain and peril by which that you spurned last night, and spurn again to-day, was brought beneath this roof. You, who would not taste, because of your humble lot and necessity to work; you, who in jealousy of the rich and great would receive no favour and smile upon no good wish. Come with me, that you may learn something of the sum of suffering and danger by which this house and all houses round about have this day been gladdened. And they who bear the camel’s load shall wear merry faces, and they

who brave the foaming main shall answer its roar with cheerful songs of home. Approach, and read the pictures that shall meet your sight."

Madge was drawn unconsciously towards the window, in which there was a bright light. She sat in rapt astonishment, as scene shifted upon scene, and still the Spirit—the bright, good Spirit at her side—talked and counselled in gentle seriousness.

"Drat the pudding!" echoed once more from a dark corner of the room.

"Let us see how it reached you, Madge, to be spurned in your unreasonable anger."

And the Spirit's finger pointed beyond the window.

CHAPTER III.

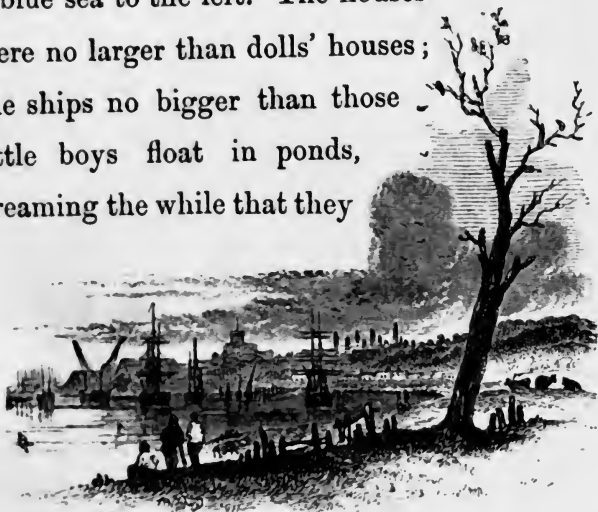
FLOUR, MILK, EGGS.

THERE was a blue haze over the window, and Madge, her hands clasped upon her knees, strained her eyes to pierce the mist. Gradually—very gradually—it warmed and thinned in the centre. Presently it faded away, as breath fades from polished steel.

A parched and dreary waste, that rose and



rose in the distance, lay before her. Little specks were moving in tracks along the waste, all converging to a crowd of houses that skirted a blue sea to the left. The houses were no larger than dolls' houses; the ships no bigger than those little boys float in ponds, dreaming the while that they



are launching leviathans. As the specks approached, she could distinguish carts drawn by oxen, and in the carts were full sacks. Wearily the carts jolted, and wearily the men urged the oxen forward. The sun flamed down a destroying

heat—a heat that rose from the parched earth, and reached her as she gazed.

Into vast granaries in the distant town were the contents of these sacks to be poured. And then, laden with hay for the oxen, these carts



must turn back on a long, long home journey, over trembling bridges, and presently through treacherous quagmire. Worn and sad, the oxen are turned into the shed, and the driver enters a

mud hut, the thatch of which will not protect him from the rain. Winter steals over the scene of the serf; for he is a serf, with a master who



may flog him as his oxen are flogged. In the mud hut crouch wife and children round a little black stove. The earth is ice-bound; the

cold searches the marrow of men's bones. The fir forest, the ice-decked branches of which rattle drearily in the breeze, gives him but the most meagre supply of dead wood, while it yields fragrant truffles to his lord. The winter will



pass only to give him labour for which he will have no pay. He must till the softened soil, and grain the fruitful furrow, and reap the golden harvest; content, if for his work he has

earned no lashes from his master's knout. The grain must be thrashed, the sacks must be filled again, the oxen must be yoked, and the dreary waste must be passed; and yet not one wheat-



ear shall pass his lips. Rye-bread, and gruel made of the grits of buckwheat and lumps of melon, content him. He has no dreams beyond: he is where his grandfather was before him—where his grandson will be. He will be indeed

grateful if he be not suddenly seized by his lord's overlooker, cast into irons, and with half the crown of his head shorn from the nape of the neck to the brow, sent, chained to fellow-serfs, to serve his Emperor on the field of battle.

Yet under the serf's leaky thatch, before his scanty fire, over his mess of buckwheat, the serf, whose hands make eastern seas of golden grain for the comfortably housed of the civilized west, there is the content that can on occasion sing a song. Even from his gloom, if he will have a stout heart, and a firm purpose, he may emerge into the light of freedom. He knows men whose cradle was not more exalted than his own, who have bought their freedom. The chances are desperate; but they undoubtedly exist. The mines of Siberia lie nearer to him than the home of a free man; but he bows

his head humbly to God, and curses not his fate.

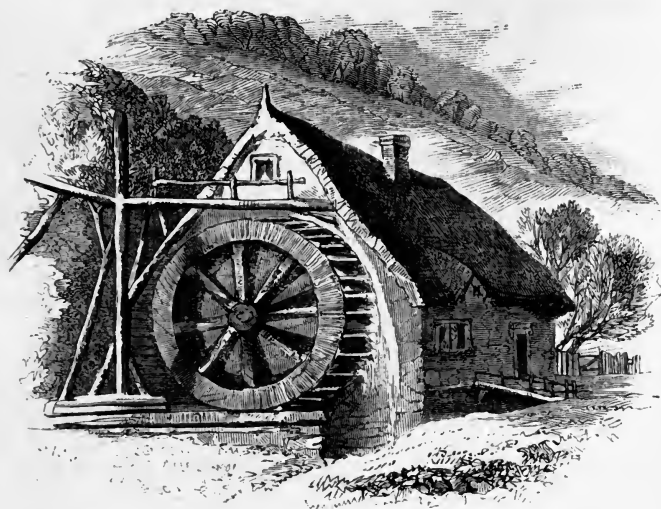
The blue haze thickened before the parched



waste, till it blotted it altogether from Madge's sight. She had no time, however, to wonder ; for the strange voice from a distant corner of the room that had already fallen on her ear, and

that now indistinctly resembled that of Possum,
smote upon her sense.

“THAT’S THE FLOUR.”



*	*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*	*

A soft wind upon the maiden’s cheek announced the movement of the blue mist. It was

paling and thinning rapidly, and as it passed away the scene darkened. The stars twinkled in a deep blue sky. Dark colourless masses of trees gently waved. Then the sky brightened, but coldly in the east; and Madge could discern a farm-yard, the budding trees about which told her (or should have told her had she not been a thorough little cockney) that it was spring time. Two or three lights danced about the yard from lanterns in the hands of farm-servants. She followed their movements with intense interest. The wind was sharp, and the air was damp, suggesting a very uncomfortable rising in the dark. But these servants had risen through the winter in the deep stillness of night, when the ice was in sharp spikes upon the well-rope, and the hay-fork almost blistered the hands; so that they could not complain now. The servants must be astir before the stock. The cows will not wait

to be milked; and the first flushing of the east brings the fowls forth in quest of barley.



The pigs grunt for food ere their eyes are wide open. There is a busy town three miles off, where there are hundreds of people who will expect to find the fresh milk of the morning upon their breakfast-tables before eight o'clock. There are chubby babies by the dozen whose bottles must be filled at sunrise, "fresh from the cow." In winter, as in summer, the busy town must

have its early milk. So the labourer must brave the sleet at five on January mornings, and with benumbed fingers set to his daily work. Nor is his reward bountiful. How often do those nurse-lings of his humble nest eat meat? Some twelve shillings weekly must buy the bed and board of



seven human creatures. There is porridge for his breakfast after the first farm work is over. Yet as he holds the lantern, and approaches the sties, he has a cheery word, even for the pigs. The plump farmer sallies forth, red, and blustering. He has issued from a homestead that is a

picture of country comfort. Within, white damask is being spread for his breakfast ; the air is fragrant with coffee and bacon. He strides boldly over his fields to where the silent shep-



herd is unfolding his flock. The day breaks with gusty showers, and the shepherd leans without a sigh against his house upon wheels, to pass the long hours with his dog, while the sheep crop the clover or lucerne. He must watch his

shaggy family, and be careful of the skipping lambs that bound about their ragged, weather-beaten mothers. They must have very close watching. The thousand ills to which mutton is heir must be guarded against. There is the shearing, and the washing; there will be stray



sheep to hunt out of neighbours' cornfields; there will be, in short, months of watching and anxiety for farmer and shepherd, before the flock will be ruddled and sold. Then there are the oxen in the straw yard. How the farmer

has calculated the cost of every turnip they eat and of every ounce of flesh they make!

As the day brightens, all the activities of a farm pass before Madge's eyes. The blood



rushes to the faces of the servants as they lift heavy bundles of straw, as they drive laden wheelbarrows, or as they steer the plough. The

dairy-maids pant as they churn hour after hour, and still the butter comes not. And when the harvest comes, it brings with it troops of ragged men and women, who are foot-sore, and who crave only rest in an empty barn, and a hard day's work for a small wage under a broiling sun. Yet when the last sheaf is stacked, is there not a nosegay for its crown? and are not three times three given over the bounty with which Heaven has blessed the labours of man, though but sparingly the golden fruit falls into the cabin of the labourer? The modest roast and thinly-fruited pudding that appear upon Giles's table, crown his year of labour with content; and the mug of ale is lifted in his cottage to smiling lips.

The film is coming over the happy scene.

"THE EGGS, AND MILK, AND SUET," cries the mysterious voice, that has already more than once sounded in Madge's ears: a voice that

sounded more and more like Possum's. But Possum was in the kitchen.

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There stole upon Madge a distant murmur, like the humming of bees; there were oppressive beatings, like pulses in the overburdened head. Then there was a clatter, as of boys far off frightening marauding birds from sown fields. The tumult of sound—the ceaseless movement—the gigantic walls—the towering columns—the whirring of wheels, and

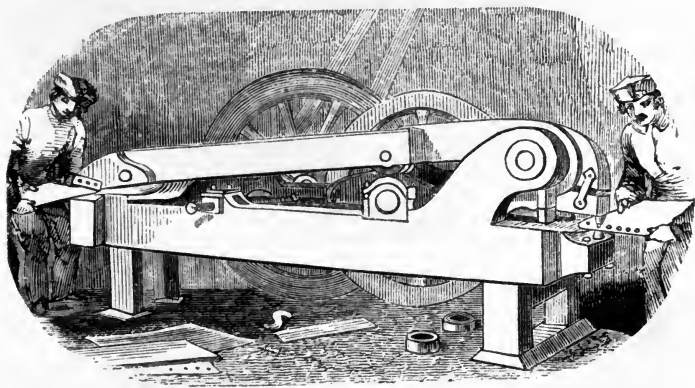
plunging of massive beams—the crowds of hurrying men, women, and children, as they took possession of her senses—entranced the staring Madge. Was she in cloud-land! Had she eaten of a wondrous weed! Still the scene



grew in distinctness, till she saw vast sheds where hundreds of men were throwing the shuttle, and which were noisy as the rattle of musketry. Then there were dark forges, with



flaming fires on all sides. Men, muscular and dark as Vulcan, were pouring liquid steel, bright

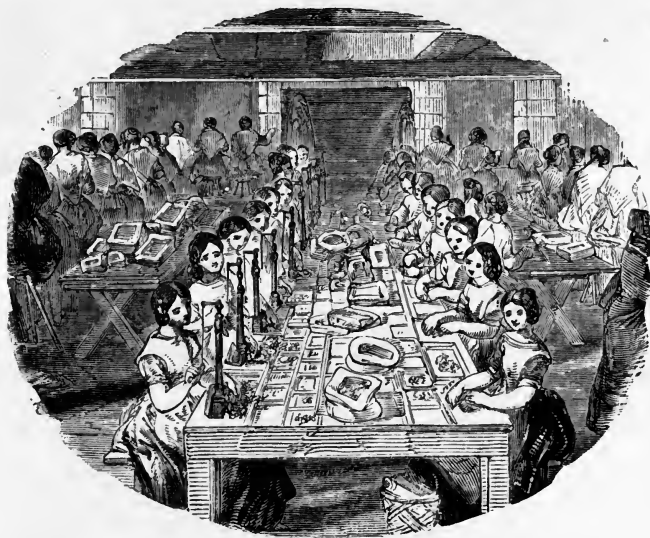


as sunbeams, into earthen moulds; gigantic hammers were flattening bars of iron, easily as a maid pats a lump of butter. Boys armed with pincers were drawing long lines of wire, like



hot sealing-wax, from mysterious machines. Here a man seized upon a misshapen lump of metal, and in a minute, lo! a copper, bright and

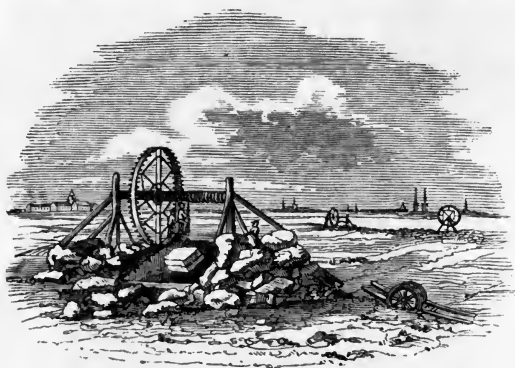
shining as the red face of Bacchus! There a youth whipped up a glistening scrap, and with the blow of a steam arm, lo! a spoon. Resting from their work, the brawny Vulcans panted as



they wiped their damp brow. Then follow perspectives of long rooms, where women are brightening and finishing the rude work of men; and dirty sheds, where great grindstones

are revolving, sending out sheets of flame, as boys and men apply blades to their resisting surface. Then a bell rings, and from hundreds of sheds and mills, from all kinds of obscure corners, men, women, and children pour through broad gateways into narrow, foggy streets. The women have but very dingy shawls to throw over head and shoulders; many of the men are bent or lame. They flow in a chattering torrent past broughams and chariots waiting at shop-doors. These elegant vehicles hold the ladies of the masters. The great houses that crown the heights round about the smoky city are the dwelling-places of the masters. And the smoke rolled over all. It rolled thicker and thicker, till poor Madge, strain her eyes as she would, could hardly distinguish a factory chimney from a lamp-post. But she *could* distinguish an upward movement of the scene. It was strange—

it was awful. The chimneys rose out of sight. Then the houses rose ; and then—she was under-



ground. The strata of the earth pointing downward were discernible. And then there were low, narrow passages, up which human creatures



on all fours were tugging little waggons of glistening ore, or dull black coal. Now a faint light appeared, and the click of a pickaxe could be heard. The heat standing in spots upon his



begrimed face, the poor miner was upon his back, picking patiently at the fruitful vein. Woful work! Hundreds of feet buried under the surface of the earth from morn to dewy eve! in

hourly peril, even with that happy triumph of science—the miner's lamp! with little hope for age, or more comfort for to-morrow than to-day brings! In the winter, the miner sees only the pale east promising the sun in the morning, and the flushed west assuring him that there has been sunlight in the evening. Life is almost constant darkness to him; and his reward is bread for himself and family. His labour supports the great house of the neighbourhood, where the owner of the mine lives. He passes the owner's daughter upon her prancing steed, and respectfully touches his cap to her. He may have a difference with his owner, but it will be only about a few more pence per week, to bring some new modest comfort to his little home. Yet a cheerful fire blazes in this home on holidays; and there are happy people there.

A flutter at Madge's shoulder diverted her attention from the wonderful window. The

good Spirit—whose presence had warmed her, and by whose grace she had seen all these wonders—floated before her, robed in drapery light



and bright as sunbeams, with mist for a scarf, and only a radiant face distinct.

“THE COPPER, KNIVES AND FORKS, AND

PUDDING-CLOTH!" whispered a voice (it *must* have been Possum's) in Madge's ear. But Madge was wrapped up in the gracious Spirit before her. And, in a voice soft and pleasant as the murmur of the south wind over flower-beds, the Spirit spoke:—

"Your own eyes have now wandered over



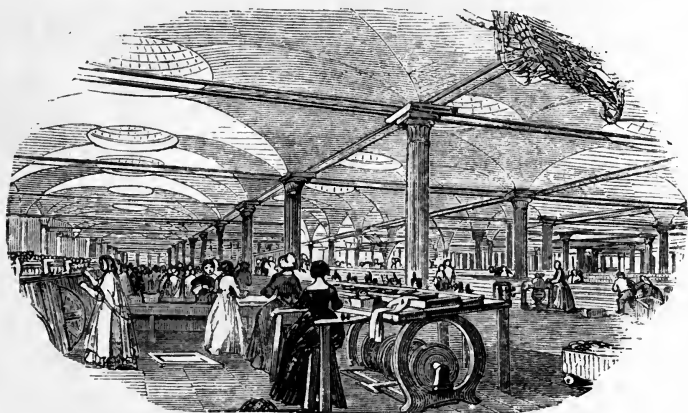
many scenes. You have seen the serf toiling over the steppes of his native country to bring you wheat; you have watched the labourer on cold mornings providing you milk and eggs; I have shown you the smith at the forge, the weaver at his loom, the miner in the bowels

of the earth. You have yet much to see before we part. You have already travelled



far, and yet you have seen but the hundredth part of the toil and peril I am bound to

show you. We must pass much, however. I might lead you where the potter moulds the plastic clay into shapely vessels for your use; into silver mines where slaves live and die, and whence hard masters send the metal



that furnishes the tables of the rich; over vast seas of cotton, where the stolen negro toils under the whip of a cruel owner; within silent prisons, where evil doers are working wicker and picking mats, under the stern eye

of the outraged law ; down muddy lanes, where men and women—human spiders—are twisting string and rope from breakfast to bedtime ; into very humble places indeed,



where sick old men, and children prematurely old, are slaving over German dolls, the sight of which has brightened many eyes to-day ;

up to dressmakers' garrets, where the midnight needle is buying scant comfort for an aged mother!"

There were tears standing—jewels of the heart!—in Madge's eyes. The good Spirit continued:—

"The pin that holds your kerchief is the work of many busy hands; the vast forests of



the icy north are felled, and great workshops are raised to yield the match by which you light your comforting fires; the cast-off rags

of the beggar furnish paper for your valentine. The cheeks of the weavers who spun your cap-ribbon are hollow; for their labour suffices not to feed them. Happy, indeed, are tens of thousands to labour through all their waking hours that the pangs of hunger may not make their nights sleepless. Even the blind and halt are not exempt from work."

Madge could no longer look in the face of the good Spirit, but cast her eyes humbly to her feet.

"But see," said the good Spirit, "we have far to travel yet."

The Spirit pointed to the window, and Madge meekly turned her eyes towards it.

"Drat the pudding!" cried the voice from a distance in the room. Madge, so strange a hold had the good Spirit taken upon her, almost burst into tears.

CHAPTER IV.

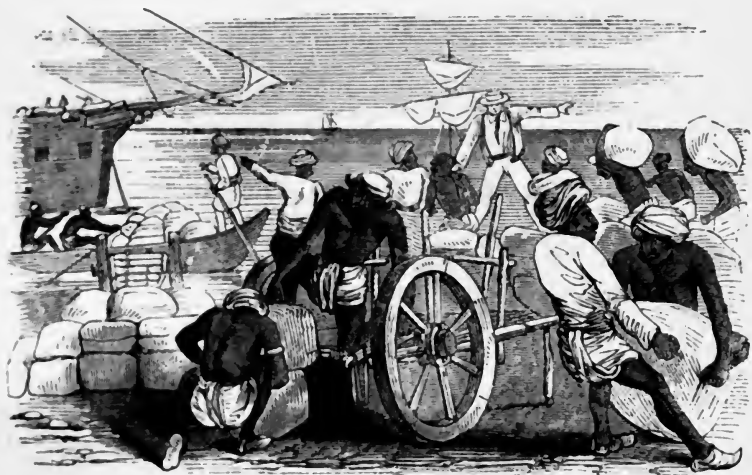
SUGAR.

THE haze before the window was now a golden red ; and there arose to Madge's face a burning heat. The red vapour skimmed swiftly past her eyes, till she thought she must be travelling swiftly,—as the lightning travels. Her lips apart, her eyes starting from her head, her hands clasped convulsively together, drawing her breath heavily and rapidly, the astonished girl waited till the red warm mist should part, and open to her the strange scene to which she knew she was drifting. Moments were long weary hours to her, so intense and impatient was her

curiosity. She had already seen strange things through that little window ; but the good Spirit had told her she was now bound on a journey to far-off regions, where nothing would be familiar to her. From her comfortable room she must survey her dusky brother bearing the fardel under a flaming sky, to send to her some of the good things she had spurned. She felt that already she had learned to bless her own condition ; she knew how humble she felt at heart ; she was burdened with a heavy sense of shame for the ungrateful spirit she had shown ; but her fault had been heavy, and she must submit to all the punishment her good genius had in store for her. Only she prayed that the punishment might not be too heavy upon a little handmaiden who was nursed in ignorance, upon whose head no gentle mother's protecting hand had been pressed.

Still the golden mist flew fast, and spectres appeared upon it that, to the excited Madge, looked very like great ships with all sails set. Then high mountains broke through the haze; then a strange, but many-tinted vegetation broke through the film which still hung about the bases of the mountains. Majestic rows of cocoa-nut trees lined the shore, their leaves almost dipping into the lively sea. Among the trees grotesque groups of black men are chattering and working. A busy city grows out of the shore, and comes to the foreground of Madge's picture. A wharf, indescribably busy, is crammed with puncheons of rum, tierces of coffee and ginger smelling pungently; hogsheads of sugar, exuding dark richly coloured molasses; bales of cotton for home looms; bags of pimento, richly tinted stacks of mahogany and the fragrant cedar,

blood-red logwood, tobacco, and arrowroot. On the other hand there are English coals, beef, pork and butter and clothing arrived to be exchanged for the rich products of the Western



Main. Chattering black men, English sailors, and solemn merchants move about these tumbled products of the East and West.

Madge stretches her neck eagerly forward

as the film gathers over this curious scene to break upon a golden sugar-cane harvest. A large gang of dusky labourers, singing a real



negro melody the while, cut the juicy harvest with the sharp muschet. Hard by, oxen, buried to their haunches in luxurious Guinea

grass, look cool and refreshing,—the green grass lying in pleasant contrast to the yellow maize and canes. The open, airy houses of the sugar planters are at hand, with their cool green jalousies. Along the river bungays are drifting with rum and sugar to the great vessels at its mouth. The fruitful soil provides, for the parched lips of man, abundant fruits. Yams, mangoes, shaddocks, bananas, oranges, Avocado pears, and melons, are at his command. The Seville orange yields a refreshing odour from the blood-wood and bullet-tree floors which it polishes with the help of wax. Pleasant, in truth, are these open, cool, and fragrant houses of the planters, where the negro waits, and where negro children work in pickaninny gangs. But where are the dusky servants? Where and how do they live? Perhaps toiling, heavily laden,

up a mountain in "a trunk-fleet," carrying dainties, hours in advance of the family, who are about to make an excursion. Can the negro not remember the time when he was summoned to work at daylight by three cracks of the whip? He has his clay-built cottage, and his garden where he cultivates his yams, cocoas and peas, and he is free. But not many years have passed since English gentlemen wrote about him as about cattle. In 1835 "a Retired Military Officer" called the emancipation of the slave the interference of "the presumed intellectual advances made in humanity." Under this burning sun there is heavy work to do, far away from the worker's original home. These vast settlements and plantations, these busy wharves, these endless rows of cocoa-nut trees, the pimento which the birds sow, this arrowroot

for which the invalid is grateful,—all are raised here by negro labour under circumstances that would appal the humblest Englishman who enjoys them. Carelessly the English servant casts her sugar into her teacup, knowing not the story of that sugar. But the scene is shifting rapidly under Madge's eyes, shifting back to the fields where the golden sugar-canes stood, and where the negroes sang at their work. The story of the sugar-cane is about to be unfolded under Madge's humble eyes.

The story of sugar might be carried back into far-off ages, of which only the dimmest fables are the unstable record. To poor Madge the question how the sweet canes of the East first got westward, whether they were borne to Venice by the sturdy warriors of the Cross to be made into "Venetian loaves," as sugar was long afterwards

called, what matters it? The travels of the sugar-cane, to Sicily, to Spain, and by the Canary Isles to the great western isles and continent, are matter for the grave historian, not to be set before a simple handmaid, who must learn her moral by plain and pat narrative. Madge saw, through her wonderful window, no warriors of the Cross carrying sweet canes, no swarthy Andalusians rudely reaping in Spanish cane fields. Before her grew a picture of the negro in a sugar plantation of the West, the grand mountains behind him, and the rich vegetation of an Indian climate about him.

He is preparing the ground for the reception of canes. The earth varies in tint from a deep chocolate to a bright scarlet, and as he turns it to the sun it glistens as though it were glazed.

The rains are commencing, and the negro's

hands are blood-red with the stains of the rich earth he is turning upon the sugar plants. Yet he must hold to his work now, for the rains are to draw the canes forth, that they may send forth shady foliage, to keep the earth about



them moist before the dry weather sets in. Thousands of miles away from Madge is the negro planting these canes, the produce of which, after long and tedious processes, and

stormy nights at sea, will reach her sugar-basin.

The cuttings which the negro and his companions have in their hands—(Madge can see them as plainly as though she were one of the party)—are the tops of the canes that have been already ground for sugar. The seasons circle rapidly; the young sprouts appear above ground, whereupon the negroes with their hands sprinkle more earth over them to strengthen them. Then the shoots start like an arrow from the ground; while the incessantly busy negroes hoe the weeds away carefully from between the tender plants, and remove all useless suckers. Then there are the plants springing from last year's planting—or second ratoons to be watched and nursed. The negroes are moving briskly in the rows, and the red earth is cleared till it glows like a gay riband between the plants. As the plants grow they

have to be protected from the most irredeemable robbers in the world.

The scene darkens to a fine night, with a sapphire sky overhead. The canes stand like silent regiments of slender men. Presently, stealthy figures approach the plantations. They drop from trees; they leap out of the long grass; they bound lightly along the roads—all chattering lowly, crafty marauders that they are! They never enter a plantation before they have planted scouts to protect them against a surprise. All precautions taken, they enter the rows of sweet canes, and there tear up, trample upon them, eat and suck at their pleasure. They destroy in their wicked frolics and greediness more than they consume. Presently dogs rush upon them, and the sharp rattle of musketry is heard. The monkey robbers—for the mysterious forms were troops of monkeys—

rush helter-skelter to the woods, driven back by the watchful negroes. But a few robbers are left upon the field, having paid for their felony with their lives. The negroes pick up the dead monkeys carefully, and if Madge could have looked into one of the mud huts that stand out of the sapphire sky, she would have seen an ebon sportsman enjoying the smoking body of his victim. The negroes are very fond of monkeys and rats—two great enemies of the sugar-cane—as food. But those canes which are ripening rapidly under Madge's astonished eyes, have little as well as big enemies. Ants, and clouds of bugs, called collectively the "blast," despoil plantations. But that which is under Madge's eyes is ripening well. The canes are a pale yellow colour. Its welcome juice is soft and grateful. Man and beast drink of it freely, and rejoice that it has come to them. Sickly negroes

recover their strength when they have tasted of the cane's ripe juice. And now the negroes come gleefully with their sharp sickles or muschets. The horses, oxen, and mules delight in



the refreshing succulence of the green cane-tops, and will work cheerfully almost without intermission, while there are tops still to reward their labour. Crop time is, it is plain, a happy time.

Busily the cutting goes forward. The tops are cast to the cattle, and the top shoot (which is full of eyes) is carefully laid aside for planting. Then the fallen canes are cut into sticks about a yard in length, and tied into faggots. The oxen drag the juicy loads of faggots to the rolling mill, which Madge sees in the distance turned by a lively stream. Her eyes follow the wag-gons; and now the mill grows from the distance into the foreground. The canes are untied and are passed between rollers that crush them to powder, while the juice from them falls into a leaden trough, and runs on its way to the boiling-house. The crushed canes here come into use in the shape of fuel, to boil the liquor they once held. The boiling-house appears, and here negroes are busy over vast coppers full of cane-juice. They cast a little Bristol quicklime into the sweet liquid, and then urge the fires till the

mixture is almost boiling; and now a thick coarse scum comes to the tops of the coppers in blistered masses. Then the fires are suddenly



extinguished, and after a time the scum is observed to sink in, the fact being that the pure liquid is being drawn off into a second copper, leaving this scum behind.

The juice is now transparent. It is in the grand

copper, and the negroes are busily preparing to get rid of superabundant water by the process of evaporation. All this part of the proceedings is a mystery to poor Madge; yet she gazed intently on, wondering the more that she could not understand the meaning of all she saw. As the evaporation proceeds, the scum that rises is removed. The process is repeated through four boilers, the liquor becoming thicker and less in bulk with every removal. In the fourth boiler, however, it remains till it is judged sufficiently pure to be removed from the fire. The negro in attendance with a ladle, dips his finger and thumb into some of the liquid, and draws it out into a thread. This thread breaks of course at last, and the negro judges by the length of the thread whether the sugar has been sufficiently boiled. The purified liquid is now poured into shallow wooden coolers. As it cools, the sugar granu-

lates above the molasses or treacle. The crystallized sugar is now removed to the curing houses. Here, over a vast cistern, are ranged rows of hogsheads, open at the top. The bottoms of these hogsheads are pierced with eight or ten holes, in each of which the spongy stalk of a plantain leaf is fixed. The sugar, not yet free from the molasses, is cast into these hogsheads, and the molasses, being liquid, flow through the plantain spongy stems into the cistern. When the molasses are drained off, there remains muscovado, or raw sugar, and the hogsheads roll, as the scene closes upon Madge's eyes, to the bungay that is waiting for them at the river side, to float them to the great ship that is to bear them to England.

All this activity passed before the eyes of the astonished Madge. All that trouble by night and day for a spoonful of sugar!

“THERE’S THE SUGAR!” cried the echo of Possum’s voice; and as Madge turned in the direction of the sound, a silver mist curtained the window once more.

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Madge buried her face in her hands, and sat in profound thought. She, who had been so cross; she, who had mourned over her lot, and refused to receive the kindnesses that had been offered to her. She felt that she had been very ungrateful.

The good Spirit’s kind face appeared once more to poor Madge; and it was welcome to her sight. There was now inexpressibly deep tenderness in the expression of the good Spirit’s eyes. In a voice soft as that of a mother speaking to her sick babe—the good Spirit spoke:—

"You have seen but the sunny side of this picture: but its very sunniest side. I have



unfolded to you the scenes of a great industry of the Western Main after the curse was removed

from it. Time was when those dusky labourers for your comfort wore heavy chains, and were covered with the stripes of cruel masters' whips. Time was when slavery was the heavy curse, under which the woolly heads bowed to their unrequited toil. When they were kidnapped in Africa; sold in God's sunlight; packed in the dark holds of ships—a groaning, stifling mass of human merchandise—victims to the wicked avarice of man. The sugar planter bought the load, as he bought his empty hogsheads. But items of the human merchandise had wives and children. When one master bought the mother item, and another bought the infant item: when again one owner purchased the husband item, and another became possessor of the wife item, cries of anguish rose to Heaven, only to be subdued by the whip of the overseer. But of what account were the

hearts of the items? The owner had the flesh and sinew, and these, by the aid of the whip, might be turned into sugar. The tears that in the years gone by were dropped among the



sugar canes kept the earth damp about them through the driest seasons. Thoughtless people in this great centre of the world's industry, sipped the sweet juices of the cane, nurtured by

the tears of their dusky brethren. The cries of mothers, the sobs of wives, the wail of children torn from parents' arms, were carried upon the wings of angels of mercy across the bounding waves. The slave's cries of anguish smote upon good men's ears. Gentle hearts were touched, and when gentle hearts are touched, lips become eloquent. It would be well for you, Madge, could your ears become sensible to the echoes of the noble things that were said by gifted, great-hearted men in behalf of their dusky brethren smarting under the whip amid the sugar-canes of the far West. The eloquence of tender hearts rose like the sweet music of the harmonious spheres, and thrilled the nerves of your generous countrymen. Wicked, hard-hearted men did sorry battle with the apostles of mercy for a time. But God gives a penetration to the gentle voice that pleads for justice and for

truth, which He denies to the loud-mouthed advocates of wrong among men. In the end, Mercy's winning prayer became an imperious demand: and never have your countrymen heard sweeter music than when they listened to the clink of the slaves' falling chains."

As the good Spirit continued, her voice trembled with emotion.

"But only a short time ago you had brothers who were bondsmen. The simple dress about you is very probably the work of a slave. Where the cotton grew over broad hills and valleys in the far West, your dusky brother toiled, the chattel of his master. In vain did eloquent men and women raise their voices, pleading for the wronged image of God, toiling in bondage.

"But we have travels yet to accomplish."

And as the tender voice of the good Spirit

died away, a light broke once more about the window through which Madge had seen so many wonders. There were tears in Madge's eyes as she turned to the light and watched the thinning vapour.



CHAPTER V.

THE CANDY AND THE SPICE.

IT was a beautiful scene that fell now under Madge's grateful eyes. The air was fragrant with the odours of pungent fruit. There are winding, deeply-rutted roads; flanked with the spikes of the blushing cactus: then there are flat, pestilent marshes, about which lazy men lounge, frowning at strangers. Deadly fevers rise from the bogs; but still the people round about repulse the kindly hand of science that would drain them. Amid the brilliant cactus hedge-rows, lie squalid huts, which the tenants are too lazy to repair. There is an almost overpowering sweetness in the air, that

steals through the windows, and oppresses little Madge's nostrils. Then sombre olive groves appear about a wall; there is a gate over which a cross is planted. This is a priest's abode, and all the lazy peasantry about, bow profoundly to him as he lounges in his gateway.

The quaint parsonage fades; and then the pungent odour becomes every moment stronger as a gorgeously coloured wood takes form, and advances from the distance. Fruit which Madge had seen only, up to that moment, upon her master's dessert table, or upon street stalls, was hanging in golden clusters upon grand, deep green trees. The ground gleamed with its yellow load, like a banker's coffers. The great trees are borne to the earth with their golden produce. As far as Madge's eyes can reach, it meets with nothing but oranges, relieved here and there by the pale citron, that looks like an

invalided orange. Oranges in the foreground, oranges in the half-distance, oranges marking the horizon ! Some of the trees are of enormous size. The king of these noble plants hath a trunk which a man can hardly clasp with his two arms. But orange trees do not quite monopolize these enchanted regions. Here and there glades of tall poplars protect their balmy neighbours from violent winds. The vagabond, roving vine (its richest fruit is always nearest to the mother earth) creeps coaxingly round the stalwart orange trees, it may be, to catch the perfume of the fruit. The clematis casts its branches of sweet flowers, wildly as a hoyden tosses her loose hair. Where the shade falls, the moss is dappled with the violet, the periwinkle, and the forget-me-not. A child, gazing innocently upon this rich array of nature, would cry "Here's Fairyland at last !" But there is a

reverse to the medal. The poor people who will in due season pluck these oranges and



lemons are wobegone and ignorant. No ray from the lamp of knowledge shoots across their

path. Within the priestly olive groves—behind the gates topped with a cross—lie all the riches of this sunny scene; for the workers there is left but the coarsest food, and dirt, and misery.

“THE CANDIED FRUIT!” cried the old voice.

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Madge could not imagine why the invisible voice was so wonderfully related to that of Possum. This voice called her suddenly from the bewildering influences of the scenes that had been spread before her—and for a moment she was frightened. But the fascination of the magic window was strong upon her. Her heart might beat too quickly now and then; but, while she trembled, she was strangely pleased. A glorious vision was now in store

for her, and crimson glimpses of the dazzling regions to which she was bound, from time to time broke through the swiftly drifting mist—a mist that was now bright as a cloud of fire-flies. Over the blue waters of the Mediterranean, through Alexandria, across vast sand plains, where, strangely enough, locomotives were panting before the sallow, weak-eyed sons of Egypt, and over broad, tranquil waters, the eyes of Madge were borne.

And then one of the loveliest visions this world affords broke upon her sight. Chains of mountains, clothed to their summits with gorgeously coloured forests, rose from the loveliest valleys the sun ever shone on. The gaudy verdure of the tropics was dazzling. The plumage of the birds gave them the right to be called “winged flowers.” Uncouth elephants fed upon the rich herbage; the monkeys chat-

tered in the abundant cocoa-nut trees ; the alligators raised their terrible jaws out of the rapid river ; jewels sparkle unheeded upon the earth ; divers rise almost breathless from the sea—in the depths of which they have sought a pearl for a lady's ear. There are strange varieties of the human race ; from the white man driving his shrewd bargains, to the wild Veddas—who roam their native forests, unclothed, and unsheltered from the heavy rains. But the industry of man is conspicuous everywhere. Some of the dusky population are cutting precious stones, others are weaving at the simplest looms, or fashioning pottery with exquisite skill. All claim bits of land, and are busy striving to win the little rewards which patient industry brings. Some of these natives own no more than five-twelfths of a cocoa-nut tree, or two-thirds of a jack tree ; but they are

proud of this possession, and they strive to increase it. The gigantic trees bear wondrous loads of produce useful to human creatures. The great cotton trees cover the earth with glistening flakes of the material for which



Manchester is so greedy. Enchanting groves of Palmyra palms afford grateful protection to the Indian villages in seasons of drought.

And now a splendid scene bursts upon Madge's sight. She passes in review, as the

scene shifts gently, ten millions of cocoa-nut trees. At the foot of these noble trees squat graceful men at work. These workers come to the foreground of the picture.

To twenty different purposes cunning workmen are turning this wondrous growth of nature. From the blossom is distilled a sweet spirit; toddy flows from the tree, and becomes sugar or vinegar; the bark yields rope, brushes and brooms, and rafters for houses, and a thatch over the worker's head; the young shoots become baskets; the crust of the trunk becomes a drum: the young leaves become translucent lanterns, or paper upon which men write with an iron stylus or pen; and music is made through the stripes of the leaf upon the cocoa Æolian harp! Wonderful is it to contemplate the many uses to which the mind of man has converted this

one growth of the tropics. Madge watches the many workmen eagerly. And presently the scene shifts seawards. Upon the bosom of the pale green sea lie strings of boats filled with fantastic islanders. These are on their



way from their native places, making their annual ambassadorial visit to the great island to which Madge has been transplanted. The great embassy is a splendid triumph of the cocoa-nut tree. The boats are cocoa-nut boats; the ambassadors are clad in the fibres of the

cocoa-nut; the ambassadors live upon the juices of the cocoa-nut. They are bearing presents to the governor of the great island, and these presents are only so many ornaments cut from the rich substance of the queen of palms. But Madge has been conducted by the good Spirit to these enchanting regions that she may watch a great industry to which she and all about her are indebted. The cocoa-nut ambassadors fade into the distance, and a busy group of natives appear about low, umbrageous, knotty-stemmed trees. The aroma that steals in through the window is as from a mixture of spice with camphor; it changes to the rich perfume of cinnamon. Madge has been transported, in truth, to a cinnamon plantation. The gaudy birds are feeding upon the berries; the grateful kine are munching the leaves; men are







extracting camphor from the roots, and boiling the berries that have escaped the birds into a sweet-smelling wax for candles. But the bark of the cinnamon-tree is its most prized part. To give pinches of cinnamon to flavour custards or puddings, thirty thousand Cingalese get employed. There is a distinct caste of men who cultivate and follow the art of peeling the bark from the trees. These peelers, or "chalias" as they are called, commence the process of cinnamon gathering by driving a sharp bill-hook into a cinnamon shoot. They then test the state of the bark by examining the gash. If the bark peel easily, the shoot is ready to be skinned; but if the bark cling to the stem the chalia closes the wound up, and leaves the shoot to ripen. The shoots that are fit for gathering are generally about five feet long. In

the scene under Madge's eyes the chalias were busily employed carrying the shoots they have cut to sheds, where other labourers are clearing them from leaves and twigs. Further on



men are slitting the bark lengthwise on each side of the cleared shoots, and peeling it off. It then appears in two semicircles. These halves are packed in each other (as spoons are laid together), and tied tightly together in solid bundles. So packed, they ferment ;

and the fermentation enables the chalia to separate the outer cuticle easily. Then the interior side of the bark is placed upon a piece of wood, and all green and superfluous matter is carefully scraped away. When the bark has been thus cleansed, and left to the air for a few hours, the strips are again placed together; and as they dry, they curl into those quill-like cinnamon sticks which at Christmas time lie in fanciful patterns upon mounds of currants and raisins in grocers' shop windows. A Ceylon sun quickly dries these bundles of sweet bark, and then, in faggots of about thirty pounds weight each, they are borne to the ships that carry them to every part of the civilized world.

"*THAT'S THE SPICE!*" cried the voice that Madge had heard so often. All this care and labour just to flavour a custard.

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Like a dissolving view the vision of the
gorgeous island that lies in the Bay of Bengal
faded from Madge's sight.



CHAPTER VI.

THE DISHES AND THE PLUMS.

CLOUDS almost sable black rolled before the window. There was a stifling smell of smoke. Sooty buildings burst at intervals

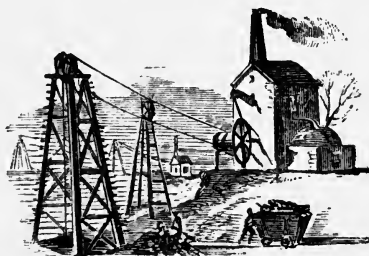


through this fog of the Black Country. When there was light enough to discover the formation of the country, Madge could perceive

that she was looking upon some great fields of dark industry. Women in uncouth, begrimed dresses were urging donkeys along black roads with black loads, past black houses and manufactories. A great, murky city passed by, seen like a dark shadow in a fog. And now, as the scene shifts, the haze becomes grey and light. A country strangely wild and barren is passed, that has a dreary grandeur about it. Dismal clammy bogs, ragged peaks, and shuddering precipices break successively upon Madge's sight. These characteristics soften as an irregular street, eight miles in length, breaks from the distance into the foreground. Sometimes it swells in width to a prodigious cluster of houses, sometimes it is like a thread. Crowds of furnaces (like gigantic punch-bowls turned upside down) come in sight. Mounds of clay, flint

and cinders are strewn about. Chapels and churches are dotted at irregular intervals. The great furnaces come nearer and still nearer, until one dominates the picture, and a great busy establishment develops itself. Great is the industry in it and around it, and deep in the bowels of the earth under it. In the background is the great hall of the master for whom the hundreds of men are working. The whole district is sprinkled with broken crockery, as though the thousands of human beings who dwell here had turned out for a mischievous holiday, and had broken pots and pans to their hearts' content. For hundreds of years have men been busy on this ground, practising the potter's art; and, even in the days of vast improvements, only humbly hoping to rival the skill and taste of workmen who kneaded clay in the far-off days

when the Egyptian pyramids were building. In the many squares which lie before Madge, the various processes which modern science has applied to the ancient art of the potter are going forward. Already the flint has been dug up and carried hither from Gravesend; these fine clays which lie in heaps have been

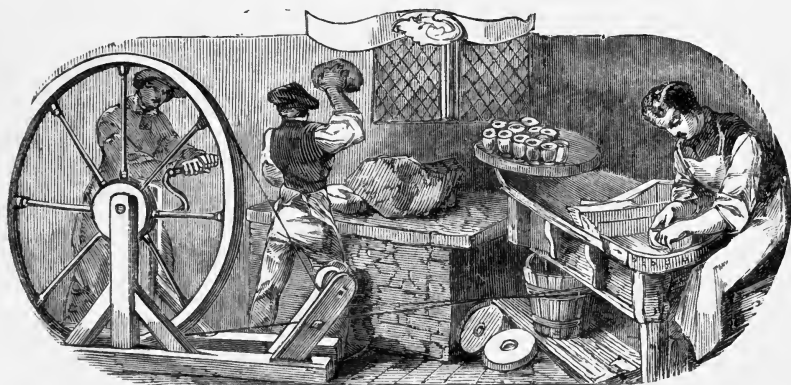


conveyed from Cornwall or Dorset. From these raw materials, together with calcined bones, will these workers evolve beautiful figures and comely vessels. But the work is tedious and involved. The flint must be burned in a kiln, and then powdered by great

iron stampers. The clay, the bones, the flint must all be reduced into a very fine powder. Then comes the mixing of the three powders into a grey batter called "slip." The men who do these preliminary duties are bespattered with slip. The houses are tinged with slip; we might almost add that the country is labouring under a heavy coating of slip. Madge now perceives the slip simmering in a large, flat open oven; it is being thickened as paste is thickened. Now the thickened slip is being pressed through the finest sieves to rid it of the minutest impurities. Now it is being kneaded by machinery.

Madge now perceives the grey dough ready for the potter's hand, and her eyes follow it to cleaner buildings than those in which she has just now been interested. It is carried to the potter's wheel, that simple wheel the invention

whereof is lost in the remote past; a stand some three feet high, with a table on the top. The table revolves rapidly horizontally, and this motion is all the skilful potter requires for the exercise of his beautiful art. There he sits



astride before his wheel, his hands dripping with water, playing fantastic tricks with the lump of slip before him to squeeze every air bubble out of it. Then he presses his two thumbs upon the top of the slip, and the wonder of his art begins. It is almost impos-

sible to follow the points of the dexterity with which his thumbs mould the inside, and his fingers the outside of a comely vessel. He leaves a perfectly circular form ready to be ornamented as the artist sees fit. In other houses men are



giving spouts and handles and figures in relief to the thrower's work. Then comes the turner, who perfects the thrower's vessels when they are nearly dry at a common lathe. Farther off great dishes and little plates are being pressed

in plaster of Paris moulds. Then there are the places where jugs and plates and basins and dishes are drying. Beyond is the biscuit kiln, a lofty oven that is surrounded by fires. Here the dried ware is placed, in oval vessels of fire-clay. When the kiln is full it is closed, the fires are kindled, and for forty or fifty hours the pottery is subjected to a fierce heat that drives all the moisture out of it. When the kiln has cooled it is emptied. Madge sees one of these kilns being unpacked, and the hardware being carried in various directions. It is now in that state known as biscuit—a state in which thousands of statuettes are sent every year over the world. But Madge must follow the plates and dishes. Her attention is called to the place where these are being glazed. The faces of the workers are very pale, for the substance with which they have to deal is unhealthy. Lead

and salt are the chief materials of the glaze, and these are mixed, in a liquid state, in large wooden troughs. The dipper takes dish after dish and dips it into the liquid, and with great skill covers even that part touched by his



fingers. Then there is the glaze oven, very like the biscuit kiln. Here the fire turns the glaze into hard glass all over the ware. The dishes and plates are now snow white and highly

glazed. But had it been intended to decorate these with colours or gold they would have visited the painting room before they were carried to the glazing kiln.

Here they are taken first by the artist who paints foliage, then by the flower-painter, then by the limner of animals, then to the gilder. They re-appear, highly ornamented, to be carried to the enamel kiln. Here the utmost care is taken. Costly ware glowing with rich designs, is being packed very tenderly. A slip or fault may entail a great loss. But long practice, patient endurance, the perseverance that has enabled man to conquer the elements and explore the hidden treasures of the earth, give steadiness to the workman's arm. The costly ware comes forth from the enamel kiln, its fine designs firmly burnt into it. But the gold does not show yet, and the ware is borne away to the

women and children who are ready in a building at hand to burnish it with burnishers of blood-stone or agate.

Peering into the burnishing room, Madge starts. It is the same—it must be the same; why, MASTER'S PLATES AND DISHES! The very dishes used to-day!

“There’s the dish for the pudding!” sounded the ghost of Possum’s voice from the corner of the room.

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The good Spirit of all these scenes of patient industry again appeared to Madge, who, on each visit, became more and more ashamed of her wicked discontent.

“You have seen the potter at his wheel, patient, after years given to acquire the skill by which he fashions articles for your use. His

skill is that bequeathed to him by generation after generation of patient potters from ten thousands of years ago, when Egyptians set their porcelain beads about their dead, and buried them in the silent passages of the pyramids. Even the glaze which you have just seen given to cups and plates was given to vessels from which the Pharaohs sipped, and protected the earthen figure of the sacred ichneumon, in the days when the people of Egypt worshipped this and other animals. The skill that fashioned the scarabæus—emblem of the generating power of the world—in lapis lazuli, cornelian, jasper, and green basalt, before this great city was a mud village—has, we may be certain, been transmitted through the rolling ages, each age adding something to the art. Had these generations of skilled men sighed and fretted over their work—had industry not

been carried on through the centuries with a brave, ambitious spirit, at this moment the



wondrous crowds of active human creatures I have shown you toiling and moiling cheerfully for their bread, would not even have the modest comforts they now enjoy. But see !”

The Spirit pointed once more to the magic window, and the obedient eyes of Madge turned in that direction.

It was bright, warm summer. Rich tracts of land, burdened with golden corn or clustering

vines passed before Madge's sight. Then solemn, snow-clad mountains rolled forward from the distance. And thus the broad sombrero and great plains of chestnut trees marked the kingdom of Spain. Then the rocks stand



out like vast ruins, and still the chestnuts issue from their fissures. In the distance, from mountain tops, the Mediterranean binds the scene as with a blue girdle. Then bursts upon the sight the gladness of a Spanish summer. Vines, wanton as a maiden's curls, twist about

the hillsides and ridges in the gardens and terraces. Olive groves give cool shade from the burning sun. Orange trees bask in the heat, and the hedges are rich with the delicious mulberry. Now, flat-roofed, lattice-windowed houses are sprinkled about the delightful landscape. The fields are divided by low embankments upon which the prickly pear and aloe flourish at intervals. There are wildernesses in the half distance where the wild bull and the wild hog disport themselves. Near the blue belt of the Mediterranean Madge perceives the sugar cane as she had seen it cultivated by negroes.

But, the general scene surveyed, the special view by which Madge is to learn yet another lesson of patient interest gradually develops itself.

A fruitful vineyard appears. The grapes are

hot in the fierce sun's rays. Men are busy among them, as they have been busy on the same ground from early spring. In all kinds of lazy attitudes the vines loll and nod under the heavy bunches. The nearer the ground



the branches grow, the richer is the flavour of the grapes. There is a useful lesson to be gathered by Madge from this; it is, that the humbler the creature is in spirit, the richer is he in virtue. The vineyard is upon the sunny slope of a hill, sheltered from the north winds. Carefully the bronzed workers prune the bunches of grapes, leaving the more fleshy or juicy bunches. Then the vines are stripped of

their many-coloured leaves, that the sun, unimpeded, may blaze upon the purple riches which they bear. They are left to ripen with their stalks half cut through. Every hour they become sweeter—till—till they are hanging lumps of sugar. The moisture, or rather, much of it, has evaporated from them, and the grapes are shrivelled. Busy people are now at work cleansing them carefully. Others dip them in a boiling fluid, wherein are wood ashes and quicklime, and leave them there for a few seconds. The fruit is then drained; and, lastly, there are the peasants, spreading vast numbers of bunches upon basket-hurdles in the sun. A rich brown field of fruit then basks and dries for fourteen days in the hot air. The bunches are now ready to be packed, and they are packed accordingly.

“SO MUCH FOR THE PLUMS!” said the accus-





tomed warning voice, still speaking from a dark corner of the room. And as the voice sounded on Madge's ear the bright vision passed out of her sight.



CHAPTER VII.

BRINGING THE PUDDING HOME.

THE good Spirit broke like sunlight into the room, and smiled upon Madge. Sweet as music borne upon a summer wind from a distance was the Spirit's voice.

"Your last journey; and we part. You have been to all parts of the world. You have seen men working in all climates, and under all kinds of hardships, to produce the few luxuries which regale this great city to-day. Your last journey will not be far hence; yet you shall see that which will astonish you."

And so saying the good Spirit faded as a moonbeam fades from a wall.

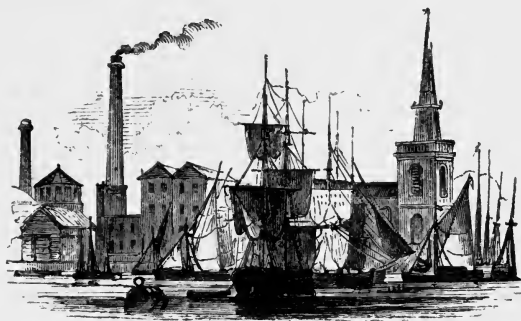
Madge turned her eyes for the last time

towards the magic window. Street after street passed before her, and every street was busier than the last. Men were hurrying in all directions; some bending under heavy burdens, others themselves oppressed with cares. It was a race sharp and close, for dear life. The prosperous were elbowing the ragged; a costermonger's barrow was stopping the way of a great baron's carriage.

Madge was gazing upon the noisiest highway of the great city. Presently masts appeared in the distance, and a great, broad bridge grew to the foreground. As the great structure moved towards her, or seemed to move towards her, the sky darkened, and the stars sparkled from their airy seats. The broad parapet presently appeared athwart the window. The roll of carriages, and the murmur of men had died away. And over the parapet of the bridge Madge



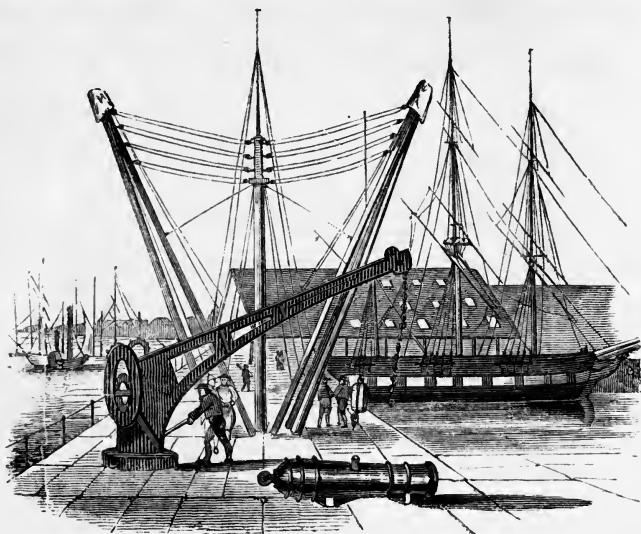
gazed upon a lovely scene, coldly lighted by the gentle moon.



A noble river, bearing the silver path of the moon upon it, rippled with a gentle voice under the bridge, and twined gently to the distance. There was a solemn silence governing the scene, not the liquid splash of a single oar broke the stillness. Along the shores, to the right and left, dark buildings bristling with cranes, and in a net of tangled ropes, closed the view. Heavy floating, gently heaving barges fringed the shores; but still there was not a human creature to be seen.

A white speck presently caught a moonbeam over the low shore far away. Madge's eyes were attracted at once to the radiant point. It appeared to glide along the edge of the horizon; and as it progressed it grew in size, and took the shape of a white sail. Yellow lights now winked as they were borne about from the dark buildings on the left. The creak of moving

cranes was distinctly audible. Flitting forms of men little bigger than spiders gave life to the shores; while the first speck of white had appeared in the distance, a puff of smoke—no



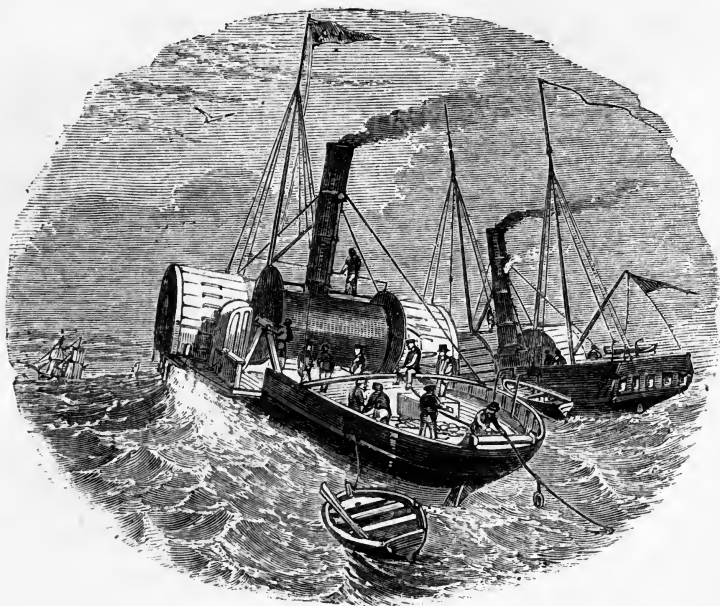
more than might issue from a smoker's mouth. The smoke, too, moved in the wake of the growing sail, and increased in volume till it was worthy of a Lancashire chimney. The

gentle wind brought to the ears of Madge the echo of a cheery "ahoy!" Frail skiffs pushed from the shadows of the shore buildings; and as oars dipped musically in the stream, they sprinkled it with diamond spray. A dark point



stood out of the horizon where the first white sail had flashed; and then a red sail; and the point and the sail grew, and followed along as in the same groove, growing and still growing.

By this time the first white sail had wound along a serpentine, and stood out from the pale heavens a noble ship, stately and white as the

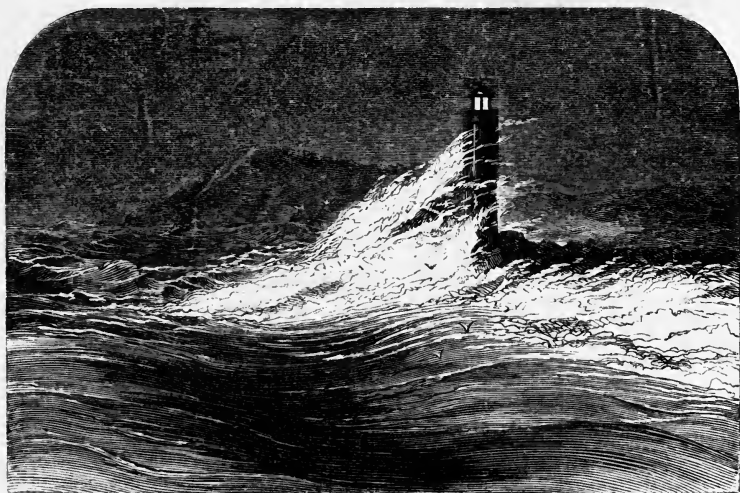


swan. Not far from her, and gaining upon her at every moment, came the smoke-enveloped steam-ship, and the thumping of her paddles smote upon Madge's ear, dull and muffled as the

beatings of a human heart. In succession the ship with red sails and the vessels in her wake rounded the point of the river, and stood boldly towards the bridge, the foam dancing at their prows. The voices of men governing the foremost ships became clear and shrill. Little skiffs flitted frantically about ; and then the click-click of falling anchors tells Madge that some of the fleet have reached their journey's end. Meantime, the quays and great sombre warehouses are busy. Porters, and clerks, and labourers are running about in all directions. The warehouse doors are flung wide open. Following close ships and steam-ships range themselves majestically in their appointed places, and as each ship drops anchor, a hearty cheer rises from her decks.

And now golden grain is being poured from the sides of the ship that led the fleet ; grain

that she has brought across the stormy Black Sea, and the angry Bay of Biscay. Great glutinous hogsheads are rolled ashore from the red-sailed vessel : here is the sugar over which the negroes



of the West have watched. The noble Indian has furled her broad canvas, as a bird folds its wings after a long flight, and is delivering up her sweet-smelling spices of the East. She has had a sad time of it in the boiling waters about

the Cape, and long nights her crew have spent at the pumps. From a slim, small ship men bear long white cases of lemons, and oranges, and chestnuts for the Christmas fire. Then ragged bales of cotton swing in the air, lifted by the creaking cranes from the depths of a burly ship that has ploughed the stormy Atlantic, and been more than once in peril from icebergs. Swarthy Spaniards lounge lazily about a compact, trim vessel, while thin and haggard men bear square cases ashore: these are the raisins that were dried upon wicker hurdles, when Madge had a glimpse of Spain. There are sweet-smelling casks also being rolled from the ship, packed with luscious Lexia raisins, that were left upon the dark earth about Malaga to ripen in the sun. Cask after cask is merrily rolled along the quays; for herein are *the* raisins specially prepared for thousands of Christmas puddings. The

fleet—the great and glorious fleet from gorgeous Ceylon—from the granaries of Odessa—from the stormy Bay of Biscay, and from the far West—has reached its moorings, and dropped its anchors where they hold firmly the bed of the river! The weather-beaten sailors wipe their hot, bronzed faces, and thank the God who has brought them safely out of the daily perils of the mighty sea. By His blessing they will have a happy Christmas in the bosom of the home from which they have been separated. They dream of babes' lips that are pouting to kiss them; of mothers whose arms are open to receive them; of wives who will look with the old, tender look in their weather-beaten faces, and bid them welcome.

Madge looks upon the hushed fleet with tears in her eyes, to think over all the labour and danger that have been cheerfully and bravely borne to bring the pudding home!

“Pray God!” she cries, her heart giving her eloquence—“Pray God that all is well with these men at home! The mother’s arms may be rigid and cold in the grave; the babe’s



slender thread of life may have been snapped long since. A mother may be planting a baby cypress over its little breast; its toys may be things now seen only through tears. Vows given to these honest men by fickle maids may

have been long forsworn! Pray God that it may not be so!"

Amen. May there be only the realization of the happy dreams at sea for every man of the noble fleet.

It fades; but the prayers of weeping Madge go with it, as the prayers of all go with the noble men who plough the seas on the great errands of the world.

But there remains yet another picture.

A dark and rugged room; scant furniture; children in tatters; a mother in tears, weeping over an infant swaddled in an old shawl.

"My good children," says the mother, "wait till father returns: we shall see—we shall see. But be sure, Bet, you take care of baby. He do look very bad to-day."

"Bless his heart!" said little Bet. She

could not have been more than nine years old ; but she spoke like a woman.

“ But shall we have a pudding ? That’s what I want to know,” cried Dick, sulkily.

“ For shame, Dick !” was Bet’s reproof, as she took the dingy bundle that represented baby in her arms. “ For shame !”

“ It’s very hard, dear children—very hard. But we wont give it up yet. The ships may be in to-day.”

Michael Day was an unfortunate man. Rogues had cheated him of his money ; he was an ailing man, and had suffered tedious illnesses, and he and his had felt all the bitterness of poverty. His sunny heart had made light of his rags ; he had suffered uncomplainingly.

“ There was misery worse than ours,” he always said to wife and children, though his soul was tortured when he looked upon the lean faces

of his flesh and blood. He was better off than he had been, however, for his wife had a little work to do, and with the odd jobs he got occasionally, managed to keep the wolf from the door, though



he had never succeeded in driving him from the neighbourhood.

It was Christmas eve, and his neighbours, in

their humble way, were making preparations for the morrow. The children of his court were exchanging reports with his children. The Parsons had such a piece of beef!—there was to be brandy in the Rumsey's pudding; Nell and Johnny and Mike were to have an orange and a penny apiece in the afternoon; little Sally had a new frock, and Dick and Bet had nothing! Baby had cost so much of late, and Michael Day had not had a single turn in the Docks for a fortnight. Sore at heart, then, on the morning of Christmas eve, did he hasten at dawn of day to the dockyard gates. It was a sharp, frosty morning; he was ill clad, but the wind had shifted. He was faint-hearted for his children, but he was not without hope. At the gates he met the usual eager band of companions in misfortune. There they were, pushing and scrambling for foremost places near the narrow door. Around

him were hapless men in all stages of rags, who had fallen from all descriptions of prosperity. There were fallen gentlemen, as well as fallen workmen. The scramble was among the famished for a crust, and there was little respect of persons. As the foremost candidates for a hard day's ill-paid work were allowed to pass the gate, the pressure of the rear became terrible. Michael Day held his ground firmly, and kept his eye upon the narrow door. He advanced steadily; he reached the threshold, and when the gate-keeper had allowed him to pass at last for a day's work, he thanked God. Aye, poor Michael Day would receive only some two shillings at nightfall, after a day of heavy labour; yet, thinking of Bet and Dick, he thanked God, and went blithely on his way to do his part in the unloading of the fleet. Michael was one of the dim figures Madge saw, rolling raisin casks

and bearing spices from the fleet that brought the pudding home.

Dick and Bet sat at home in deep cogitation.



The baby cried incessantly. Bet turned it on its stomach, tossed it in the air, held it to her bosom, tempted it with milk-and-water, and still it cried

and plunged. The little maid was at a loss at last what to do with her charge.

"I wish mother would come home," she said.

"I wish father would," Dick replied. "I *should* like a bit o' pudding to-morrow, anyhow."

"You will have it, Dick, if it's to be had; and it's very wicked of you going on so."

Still the baby screamed, and still good little Bet coaxed and fondled it.

"Well, I'm not a grumbler, Bet, you know; but *it is* hard. A bit o' puddin' and a penny to spend afterwards (and I shouldn't be particular about the plums neither), why, I'd be as merry as a king, that I would."

"But you a'most made mother cry, Dick, when you worritted her about the pudding, when you know you will have it if it's to be had. Isn't father looking after work? isn't mother slaving? and isn't baby ill—bless his heart?"

Here Bet buried her head in the dingy bundle, from the depths of which the little invalid was still screaming.

“Well, I didn’t mean to say nothing,” Dick expostulated. “And who’s fonder of puddin’ than you?”

Bet, in her quiet, womanly little way, admitted the soft impeachment. She *was* fond of pudding; but what had that to do with it? She could go without. Mother, nor father neither, should have to say she had been wicked enough to grumble when she knew that the best had been done to get it. Dick was perplexed by this rejoinder.

“Well, let’s hope for the best, Bet. But I was in the Lane to-day, and wasn’t there a show at Candy’s! The plums up to the second pane of the shop front; lemons dropped about, for all the world as though they wasn’t worth a farthin’

a dozen. Holly enough for twenty Jack-in-the-greens; sugar piled as high as Primrose Hill; Christmas candles by the bushel, and only a farthin' apiece; rice enough to feed the whole court for a year or more. You might have made walking-sticks of the barleysugar. Didn't my mouth water, and didn't I flatten my nose against the window!"

Hour after hour the two children spent together in anxious expectation of Michael Day's return. If he got a day's work, they were to have a Christmas pudding on the morrow.

"He must be in the docks, or he'd have been in before this," said Dick, as the shadows darkened in the dreary room that was his home.

"I hope so, but we have hoped so often," was Bet's reply.

It was quite dark when Jane Day, Michael's wife, returned to her children. She panted as

she ascended the steep stairs, and when she reached her room she sat upon a chair, exhausted. Bet soothed her, untied her bonnet, and told her baby had been quiet for the last hour, although he had been "uncommon fretful" before.

"Has your father come home?"

"Not caught sight of him yet," responded Dick, rather moodily.

"Well, well, perhaps it's for the best. We'll see what can be done, Dicky dear; we'll see."

Mrs. Day, having recovered her strength, drew from her pocket, furtively, two or three oranges and a handful of nuts, which she hid, allowing only Bet (who was her *confidante* in all things) to see the treat in store.

A clear, cheerful whistle was heard upon the stairs, accompanied by a heavy tread.

"That's father!" cried Dick, springing towards the door. Dick disappeared down the staircase, and presently sent a loud hurrah echoing through the house.

Michael Day entered his room carrying Dick upon his shoulder. He had had a day in the docks, and he had come back with the good tidings.

"We're not so bad off, after all, Jenny lass," he said to his wife. He placed his day's earnings in her hands as he kissed her. "Pray God there may be none to-morrow more miserable than we shall be."

Dick crept between his father's knees, and looked into his face. "Then we shall have a puddin', after all, eh, father?"

"Aye, Dick, that you shall; and your fill of it. And so shall Bet, for she deserves to eat like a princess."

"And baby," cried Bet. "Baby shall have some of mine."

It was enough to break Madge's heart to see the cheerful household of Michael Day ; to see contentment with a crust and a sip of water. The scene melted and reformed. The family of Michael Day were eating their Christmas dinner. There were bent forks, chipped plates, coarse yellow dishes at the humble banquet. By the side of Michael stood a bright pewter mug of ale. Dick had been severely washed by his mother ; Bet looked neat, and had carefully mended the hole in her dress. Michael's clean grey stockings were the wonder of Dick. This was indeed a holiday. And there were new strings to baby's cap ! Jenny Day alone showed no marks of money recently spent on her adornment. It is in the power of the poorest to

be clean, and she was cleanliness personified. But the unselfish wife and mother was content to see Michael cheerful and her children happy. She dressed herself in her happiest smiles, and looked well.

What remained for Michael who had helped to unload the fleet? Only a few crumbs. A little bit of beef had been bought late last night—a great bargain. The potatoes were balls of flour; but then Jenny had taken great care, for Michael loved a mealy potato above all things.

“Eat away, Dick, my boy,” said Michael; “there’s plenty here,” pointing to the dish where a little meat remained. “Jenny lass, are you getting on tidy?”

“Bravely, Mike,” said Jenny, who had but the smallest piece upon her plate.

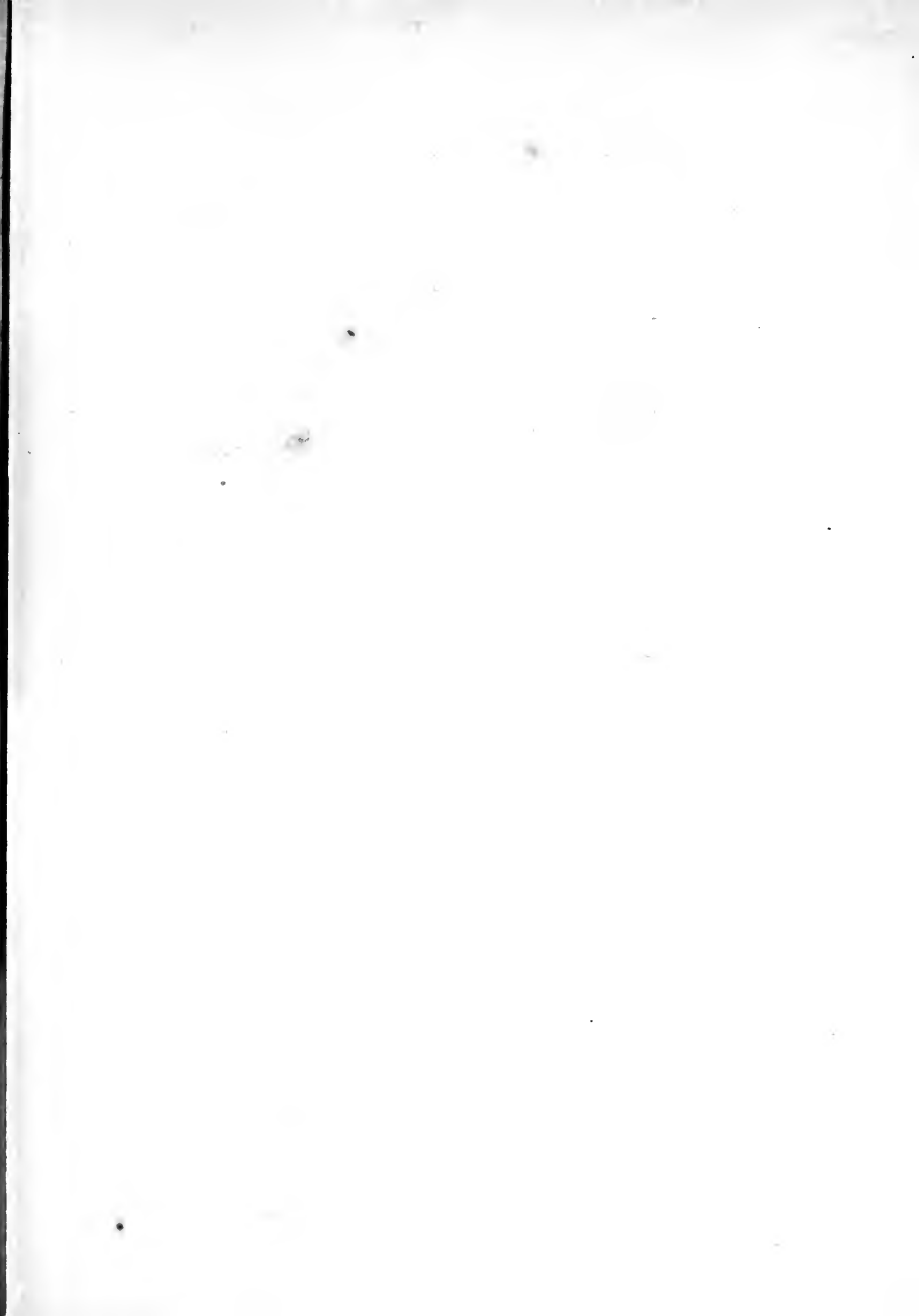
The pudding was bubbling in the saucepan over the fire. When Jenny Day rose

to take it out that it might cool, Dick and Bet interchanged glances expressive of the deepest emotion. The pudding at length smoked upon the board. It was a very small pudding indeed. The plums were as scarce as in a Yorkshire academy's pudding. Dick, as he looked at it, felt that he could eat all of it with ease, and ask for more.

"There isn't too much of it, is there, Dick?" said Michael to his boy, laughing as he spoke.

"As much as is good for us, I'm sure," was the rejoinder of Mrs. Michael.

The larger lumps were for Bet and Dick, who proceeded to eat the precious dainty—but slowly, very slowly. Dick had announced his intention of being as long over it as possible. The last crumb was finished with a lingering finger.







MICHAEL DAY'S CHRISTMAS DINNER.

“Thank God on this holy day, on this day of mercy, for all His bounties,” said Michael ; and his wife said “Amen.”

The light dims upon this picture of content, and Madge prays that it may be well with Michael Day and his, evermore ; for indeed they deserve it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LESSON OF CONTENTMENT.

THROUGH the window the stars twinkled brightly out of a cold blue sky. The houses opposite were garnished with snow, and lights danced in the windows through rose-coloured blinds. A passer-by hummed a Christmas carol on his way home. Madge had thrown herself upon her pillow, and buried her head. She was sobbing loudly. She felt how wrong she had been,—even she, a handmaid who worked all day for but the most moderate wages. She could never meet the gaze of her mistress, much less of Possum,

again. That she, who had a kind mistress, who was comfortably housed, and for her chief work only the care of happy children, should have frowned and pouted because she was not as rich and able to be as idle as the people whom she had served. It was very wicked, with the figures of slaves toiling in the West before her, she knew it was,—very, very wicked.

A gentle hand fell on her shoulder as she lay weeping. She started to her feet, then humbly fell at the feet of the sweet Spirit to whom she was indebted for the knowledge of her past error.

“Every good creature sees her faults through tears,” said the Spirit. “Be comforted, and listen to me.”

“Have mercy upon me, for I know all my fault!” cried Madge, in supplicating atti-

tude. "I have been a proud, ungrateful thing in comfort ; and I have seen better creatures than I can ever hope to be borne to the earth under their work and their



masters' whip, and yet who have been in their humility cheerful. Don't make me hate myself, good Spirit !"

“You shall be happy henceforth. Peace, and listen to me.”

“But, good Spirit, be gentle with a poor, ignorant thing like me.”

“Peace!

“I have wrung your heart to cleanse it. I have carried you from the humble sphere of your daily labours to the scenes of human activity which have supplied the dainty peculiar to this most solemn, this rejoicing day. You have seen the slave sweating at his work, you have heard the crack of the cruel master's whip. The poor miner, lying in damp shafts deep under ground, has claimed your pity. I have shown you at what pains your spice-box is filled. The story of a pinch of currants is one of labour and of stormy sailing over boisterous seas. Your eyes have followed in the wake of the Russian serf

urging his master's oxen over dreary and almost trackless wastes to bring you bread. You have watched the farm-servants groveling on frosty mornings in the dark to send milk and eggs to you; the shepherd passing his weary day in sleet and rain while the cattle fatten on the moor. I have pointed out to you your dusky brothers stolen from their homes and carried, cooped in stifling holds, across the broad waters to be sold to merciless owners who respect not the tears of a wife nor the wail of infants. All this have I shown you from the snugness of the roof under which you live. But there remains a lesson nearer home;—a lesson that is at your elbow."

"But indeed I feel my wickedness," cried Madge.

"Peace!" said the good Spirit, gently. "Still

a few minutes, and my task is done. I tell you there is a living lesson at your elbow. There was a friendless orphan boy, born of a father who was a bad man, who sent his wife weeping to her grave. Then, bankrupt in fortune and in fame, he followed her. The boy stood penniless and alone in the world; but he had the gallant spirit of his mother, and he trudged to the great city where he now dwells. He took the meanest service; he was a drudge in rich men's houses. He went supperless to bed from workshops the masters of which drove home in chariots. When comrades idled winter evenings away, he sat in his garret poring over books. Every morning found him punctual to his work; every evening was he cheerful, aye, when his bones ached after the burdens they had borne. He had a reverent nature, and took the smallest crumb of fortune with a grateful heart. He thanked God, when

his companions cursed fate. To him every day was a step forward. His master's eye fell upon him at last, and some of his burdens were cast from his back. The little promotion that his comrades would have despised, or at least for which they would not have paid the close attention he had paid, gave him fresh courage still to work harder, still to hold silent interviews in his garret with the good books that had been his best friends. He shaped with unremitting care the destinies that were rough-hewn for him. Work, with hope, is delightful to a loving creature. To accomplish something daily, to press the pillow at night, satisfied that the labour belonging rightfully to the day just closed has been handsomely done, is to know all the sweetness of sleep. This sleep the orphan boy enjoyed.

“Tempted daily to abandon for a few hours the

darling purpose of his life, the boy still remained firm as a rock. His strength grew with his knowledge. He had no powerful patrons; his only friend was himself. All work that was entrusted to him was conscientiously performed, so that when his master had a very important task to commit to his servants, he entrusted it to the good orphan boy. Then a second step was won. The boy became a man—was the most valuable servant in a great establishment. He became confidential clerk, manager, partner. His old master, when tired of the tear and wear of business, felt that he could not do better than take his valuable manager into partnership, and retire to rest through the evening of his life. The thrifty, gallant orphan boy, who had journeyed with empty pockets to the great city, now reaped the rich reward of courageous perseverance, and that humble gratitude for the

smallest favours of Providence which keeps the spirit light through the weary days of toiling for a crust,—which all must pass who are architects of their own fortune. Become a partner, the sometime friendless boy redoubled his exertions. Under his vigorous and clear-sighted management the great establishment thrived. The new partner became a welcome visitor to his old master's house. The soft eyes of Helen, his old master's homely daughter, fell upon him. Every day he was more welcome than he had been yesterday. On a happy June morning his sight was gladdened by the figure of his Helen standing at the altar rails, whispering that she would honour and obey him through her life henceforth. The sunny years rolled into the past, and left three children at their father's knees. Not a year passed by that had not given new wealth to Helen's husband.

There was not a creature under the roof of the happy couple who did not rejoice to find himself there. Yes," the good Spirit added, after a pause, "there was one creature, once."

The light was breaking upon poor Madge, and she exclaimed, "I catch your meaning. Spare me!"

"My story shall be told to its close," said the Spirit, rather sternly, compelling Madge's silence. Madge listened, her eyes humbly bent to the ground.

"Yes, there was one creature once, who saw everything with jaundiced eyes. Her share of duty to be done was performed with sulky brow and with angry words. She rebelled hourly against the sphere wherein her lot of life was cast. The children's pretty ways touched her not, for she saw in them only so many expressions of advantage over her. She made her

fellow-servant's life a miserable one with her sad repining. She knew nothing of her master's life—how he had trudged almost barefoot to the great city, and how he had won his way by labour, compared with which hers was the merest child's play.

“The orphan boy”—the good Spirit's voice was solemn now — “was Madge's master.” Madge now fairly sobbed aloud.

“The discontented girl was Madge. But Madge will be cheerful henceforth. There are happy days in store for you ; and you shall be the sunlight of a poor man's home. You shall raise children of your own ; and you shall preach homely lessons of content to them.”

“Merciful Spirit,” cried Madge, throwing herself upon her knees, “I thank you for the wickedness you have driven out of me.”

“And now my task is done. Farewell.”

“For the love of Heaven, stay with me yet a moment!” Madge exclaimed, grasping at the robe (not more substantial than moonbeams) of



the vanishing Spirit. “Stay and tell me who my gracious benefactor is.”

“I am”—and oh! the winning smile that beamed upon the Spirit’s face!—“I am the SPIRIT of CONTENT! Farewell!”

And, in darkness and in the cold, Madge found herself alone. But in her heart there was a warmth, that only the grave would extinguish.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRIUMPH OF CONTENT.

HERE she is ! Here she is !” shouted merry voices outside Madge’s bedroom door. And the children rattled the door handle, and kicked at the panels vigorously. Of course Master Uly was the ringleader. He blew a shrill whistle ; then he squeaked through one of those awful instruments, dear to childhood, a tin trumpet. A musical apple took up the concert ; and a cracker finished it.

“Open the door,” shouted both the children at once ; “and see what we’ve got for you.”

Madge was silent as a mouse. The in-

fluence of the good Spirit was still upon her. Again and again she thought of the wonders she had seen: again and again her heart sank within her. She could have thrown open the door, and clasped the children to her bosom; but shame restrained her. It seemed to her that they ought to despise her for her wicked ill temper and jealousy. Their persevering kindness was only another reproach to her. She longed to be happy with them: but still, while they rattled and shouted, she hesitated.

The voice of Possum coming up the stairs, however, gave Madge sudden energy. That voice had mysteriously sounded to her: and she felt that Possum must know all about the good Spirit. Madge smoothed her hair; dried her eyes; hastily cast on her liveliest cap and her whitest apron—and smiling her

best smile—she threw the door wide open. It was a great effort, and her cheek was very red when she saw Possum's look of wonder.

"Oh, you're in a good temper, Madge, at last," said Master Uly, saying, as precocious children will say, exactly the thing most calculated to heighten an embarrassing scene.

"Get along with you, master," retorted Possum, with her womanly tact. She was too delighted with Madge's changed humour to bear the chance of a relapse. "Madge looks good-natured—as she always does." Possum indulged in this good-natured flight of imagination—good old soul that she was—with the best intentions. But Madge felt it as satire, and winced.

Baby broke up the awkwardness of the

moment—as babies will very often. Their fresh nature offers a refuge for the heart when it is bewildered by conflicting emotions. Madge whipped up baby, who was literally buried in toys, and whose chubby mouth was as adhesive as any plaster from the combined effects of figs, candied green-gages, sugar bottles, and comfits, mixed carefully with some honey, which Possum had given him for tea (blessing his heart while she destroyed his stomach). The baby's hair was tumbled; his waist was as close to his shoulders as it could conveniently get; his pinafore bore the distinctive marks of all the courses he had enjoyed at dinner; there were cake crumbs, bits of pudding, and orange flesh in the folds of his frock; in short, the baby at Paramount Villa was as clammy, as unable to eat anything more, as was baby

next door, or baby over the way, or baby in the next street. It is true that Madge, when she caught up the baby—that is, our baby—declared that there never was such a child (and he was as round and tumbled as a wren asleep), but we ascribe this pretentious assertion



to Madge's enthusiastic affection. Were there not Madges at any turn and corner of the great city, on that happy night, when the poorest of God's creatures, in the harshest unions, get some comfort to mark the holiday?—were there not Madges, we repeat, in

hundreds of households at that very moment, declaring of the infants confided to their care, that "there never was such a child?"

And it is happy for children that it is so; that every born child—to those who beget it, and to those who wait upon its helpless hours—is the child *par excellence*. As Madge, in the new, glad spirit that was upon her, hugged her master's child, no thought of the hard times separation from children so fondled and so loved must bring upon such as Madge. A hasty word—a fault such as any of us may commit any day—breaks a link, tender almost as that which holds a mother to her child; and the nurse is parted evermore from the child whose first word she caught, whose first steps were made at her feet. There is seldom a thought given to the good creature for the days of vigilance which have shielded the babe from harm,

nor for the tender courtesies which encompassed it, and kept its heart gentle. As we watch Madge, hugging the youngest born of her mistress in her arms, we cannot help pitying her.

But now no time for reflection was left to her; for Master Uly was tugging at her skirts, and Miss Cecilia was begging her to go down stairs at once. Madge felt that she could hug all her young charges; but she was determined, much as the young gentleman struggled against it, to carry baby down in her arms.

“Hurrah!” roared Uly, as Madge descended. “Here she is. Hoo-rah!”

“Not that way,” said the enthusiastic heir to the Barthlemy honours; for Madge was proceeding to the kitchen. “Here, papa, Madge is going to the kitchen.”

Mr. Barthlemy appeared at the door of the

room in which the Christmas tree stood, and told Madge to come for her presents. As her master stood before her, in his shining black suit, and with his deep white neckcloth (deep almost as that of Brummell), Madge thought of the shoeless boy who had fought his way to London, and was abashed.

"That's from Mrs. Barthlemy," said this lady's husband, putting a piece of neat stuff for a dress across Madge's arms.

"Thank you, ma'am," said Madge, colouring as red—to use Uly's impertinent simile—as a fire-engine.

"From me, with my love," simpered Miss Cecilia, as she drew a gay neck-riband round her confused maid's neck.

"Now, baby," said Mrs. Barthlemy, giving Master Orlando (who could hardly be persuaded to take a biscuit from his mouth while he

went through the ceremony), "give that to nurse."

A pink silk bag full of sweetmeats was here-upon handed to Master Orlando, who was about to open it that he might help himself to some of its contents, when he was called "a greedy child" by his affectionate mamma, and compelled to hand over the present to Madge.

"Thank you, baby," said Madge; and she whipped Orlando into her arms, and covered him with kisses.

Labrador had his present also. He gave Madge a Bible, plainly but solidly bound: as the Bible should always be covered.

A very merry evening was passed, in short, at Paramount Villa. Madge was heard to hum a lively air, as she helped Possum put the kitchen "to rights." Baby was carried off to bed, with a cake in one hand, and a

lump of sugar in the other—supremely happy and completely incapacitated for further eating. Uly hid Mr. Labrador's hat, that the old gentleman might not leave at his accustomed hour. All were children in that house—for the evening—for the gentle Spirit of Christmas was upon it.

Mr. Barthlemy had a game of Hunt the Slipper; Mrs. Barthlemy played at Hide and Seek; and for a brief space Mr. Labrador was baby's horse, his coat-tails being converted for the nonce into reins.

And Madge, happy as a lark, hummed at her work, and welcomed Christmas.

MAY Christmas be always welcome among us. For he brings with him a spirit that is kindly and generous. He has a soul in him that

soars above the sordid influences of the market-place and the Stock-exchange. He has an open, charitable hand. He flings the comforts of the well-to-do for the brief hour of his presence among us—into homes that, through the weary year, are dulled by want or by ill-paid labour. His influence extends to the hapless inmates of workhouses—even to the wobegone wretches who, while Belgravia airs the money-pride of livery, have but the broad dome lighted by the stars for a roof. He brings gladness to little brigaded shoe-blacks as to the comfortable children of palaces. While he is with us roast beef and pudding are for all God's creatures among us. In refuges and soup kitchens, in all the hundred institutions with which gracious English charity has ennobled our race and made it venerable in the eyes of foreigners; among the halt and blind,

aye, among the criminals who are striving to cleanse themselves of their moral leprosy, there is warmth and comfort in the smile of Christmas.

And should not Christmas be doubly welcome to the prosperous man? Should he not open his bulky Christmas hamper with special delight, seeing that he may say to himself—on the day when this plump capon shall smoke upon my board, the poor, the very poor, will eat—"Pensioners on the bounty of an hour." Charity's wings shall be at their fullest stretch, covering every brother and sister.

So regarded, may we all cry, "Right welcome, Christmas!"

If Christmas Day is to be a day of universal comfort, it must be a day of universal charity. No man must put his knees under his mahogany without being able to say to

himself, "Towards the universal rejoicing of this hour I have done my honest part. My groat has been cast blithely into the capacious treasury by which England buys stores for her poor. There are unhappy creatures whose mouths my hands have filled this day; there are thirsty lips to which, a heartfelt tenderness teaching me, I have lifted a full cup. I have remembered in my humble way the story of the Great Master to whom this day is dedicated. I have forgiven injuries and have dispensed blessings.

Every man must of his own knowledge be able to spread his charity usefully, but let every man give to the poor. Let him not see a holly berry before he has justified its place in his home by the care he has taken of those who have no homes.

Why not a new picture of Christmas; of

gentle King Christmas? We call to mind portraits of him by the dozen. His eyes sparkle with wine; his thick lips are greasy with the fat of the land; his hand grasps a full beaker "from the warm south;" and garlanded about his sensual head are game and fruit held by rosy Bacchantes. He is the surfeited genius of the kitchen. He looks rather like a Dutch boor carousing under highly auspicious circumstances. He shall not, in short, be our figure of Christmas. Were it not for the holly about him we might mistake him, with those wine patches upon his cheeks, for some jolly host of a roadside "Red Lion." Now why should the smiling charity of our Christmas be so travestied and degraded?

We would have him cheerful, open-handed, and not a mere tippler with a capacious

paunch. We would encompass him with allegories, or types of kindness and love. The good cheer and the holly should be his; not a plum would we filch from his snapdragon. But the cheer should get its zest from the happy memory of good things done, and the kindnesses traceable to his gentle nature should be abounding as the snapdragon prizes.

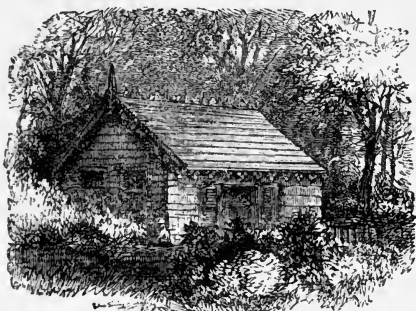
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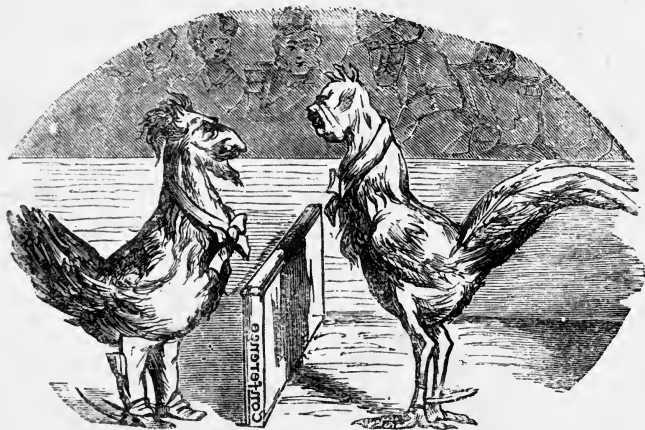
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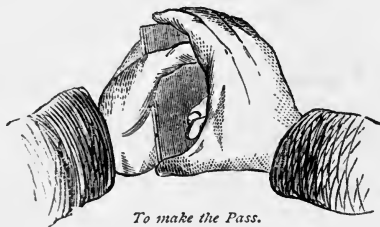
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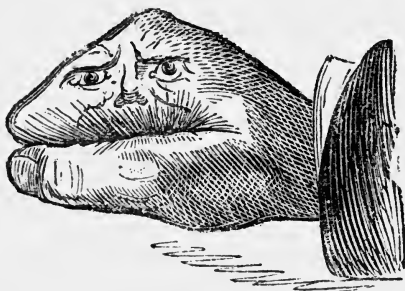
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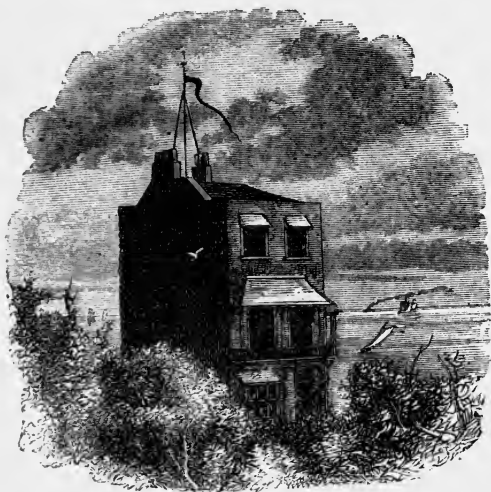
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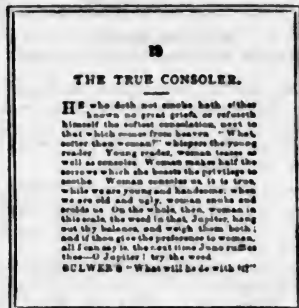
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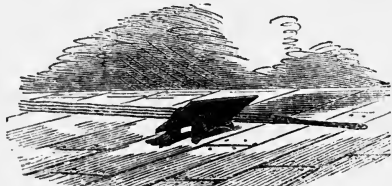
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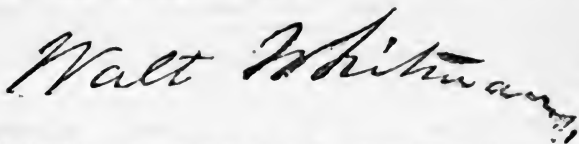
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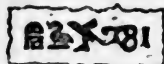
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